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Ebrahim et al.

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(54) **CONTAINER FOR FOOD PRESERVATION AND PRESENTATION**

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See application file for complete search history.

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

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(65) **Prior Publication Data**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. PCT/CA2023/051326, filed on Oct. 6, 2023.

A container for food items includes a base and an insert. The base includes a bottom panel and a peripheral bead having an inner sidewall extending upward from a perimeter of the bottom panel, a top wall extending laterally outward from an upper end of the inner sidewall, and an outer sidewall extending downward from a laterally outer edge of the top wall. At least a lower portion of the inner sidewall and the bottom panel enclose, laterally and from below, a liquid collection reservoir. The base includes a base peripheral engagement surface extending about the collection reservoir. The insert includes a support panel having an insert peripheral engagement surface releasably inter-lockable with the base peripheral engagement surface to assemble the insert to the base with the support panel overlying the collection reservoir. The support panel has at least one aperture for draining liquid from above into the collection reservoir.

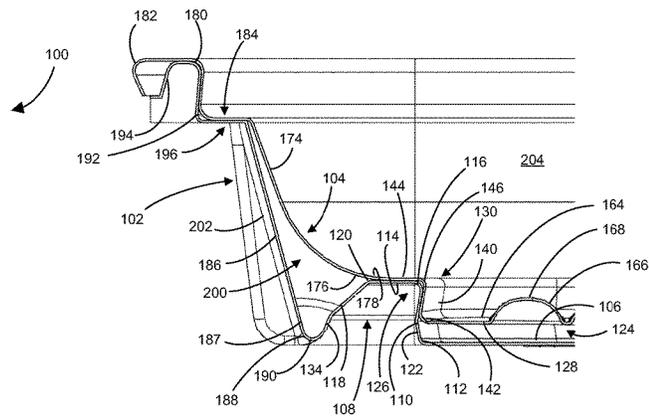
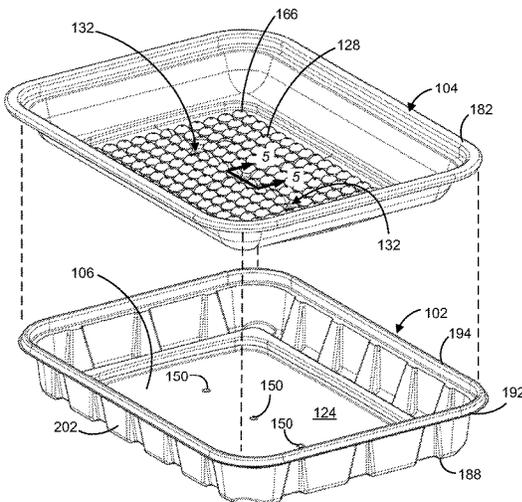
(60) Provisional application No. 63/414,271, filed on Oct. 7, 2022.

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B65D 81/26 (2006.01)
B65D 75/52 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
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(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC .. B65D 25/107; B65D 81/264; B65D 75/525; B65D 81/262

27 Claims, 19 Drawing Sheets



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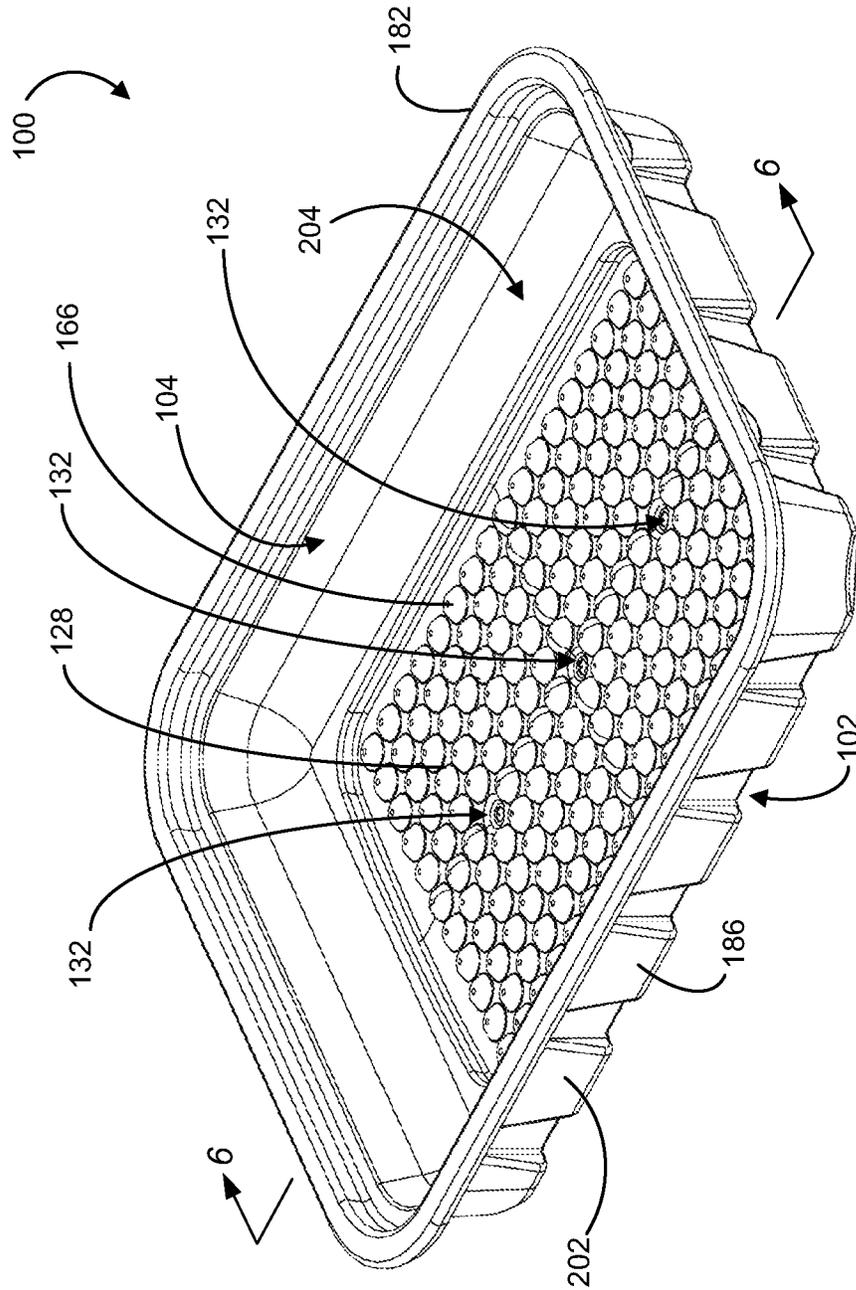


FIG. 1

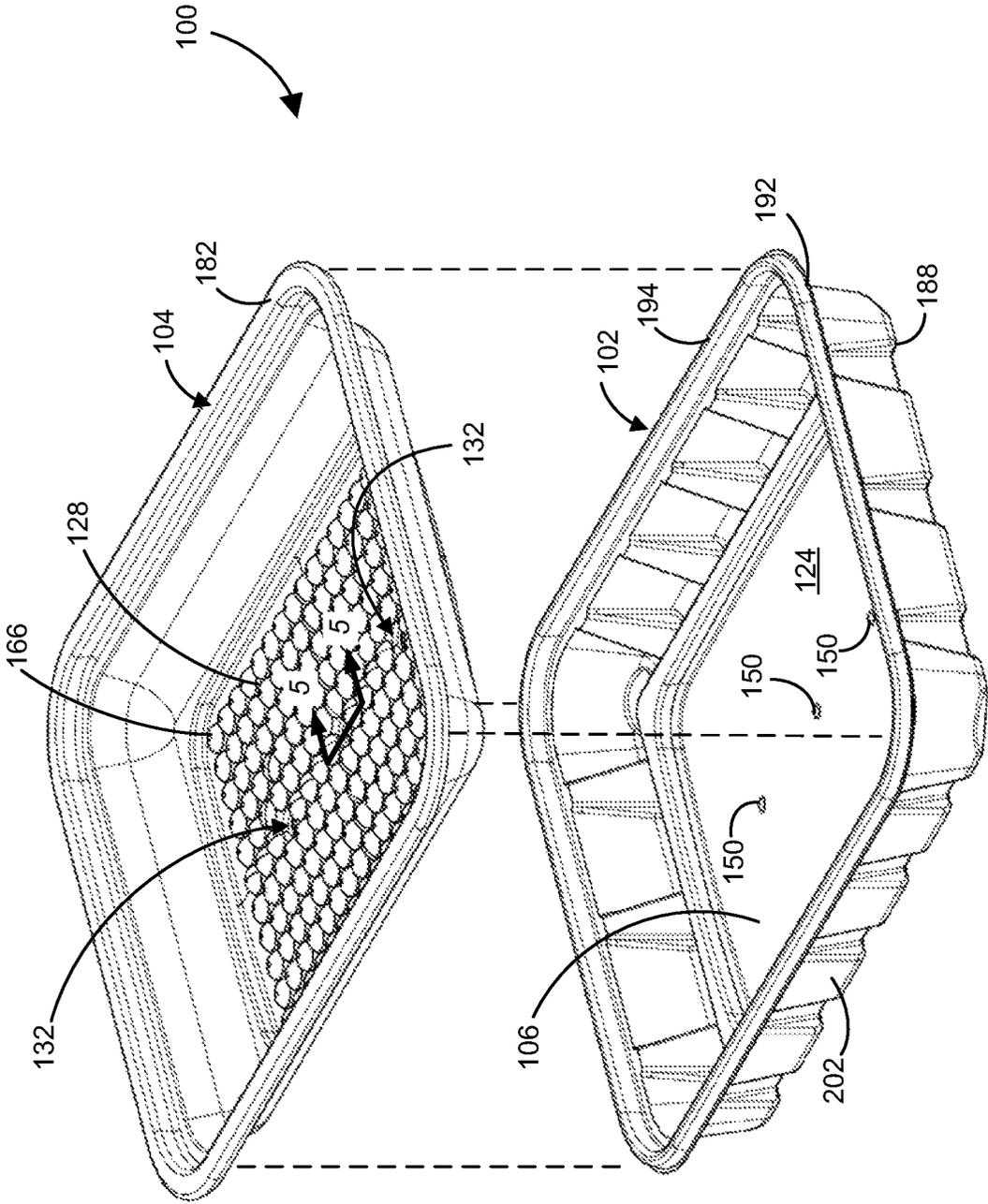


FIG. 2

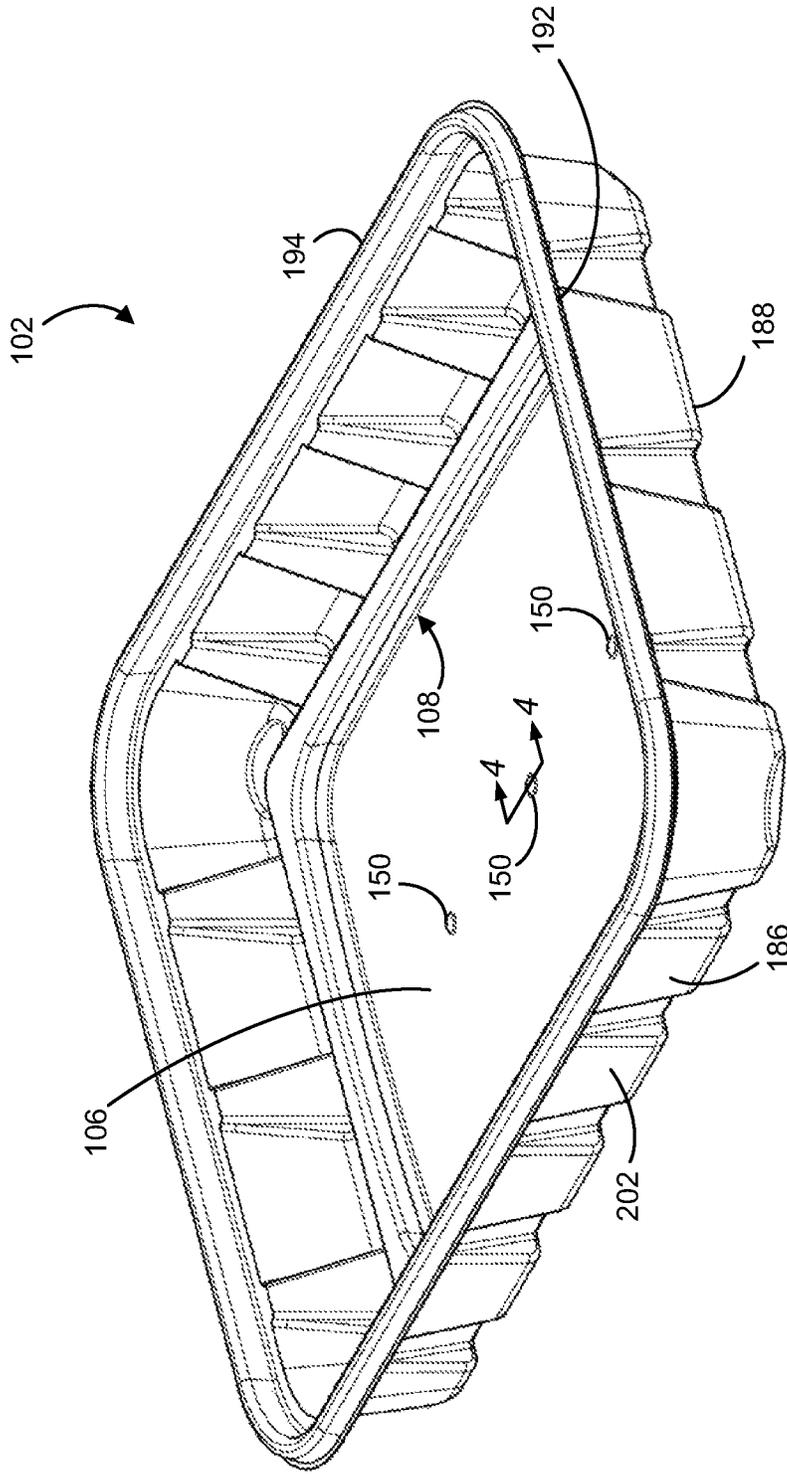


FIG. 3

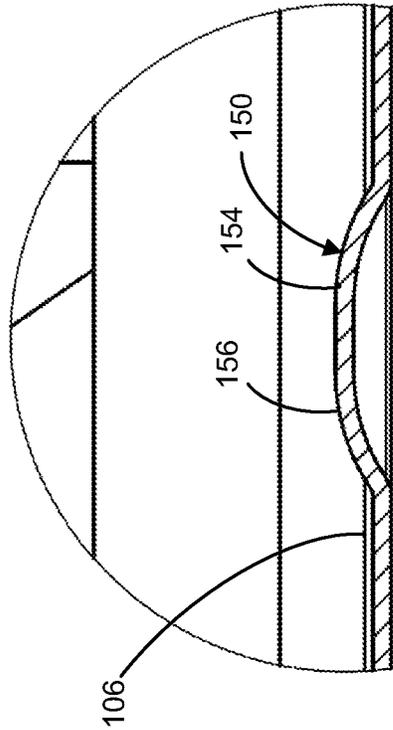


FIG. 4

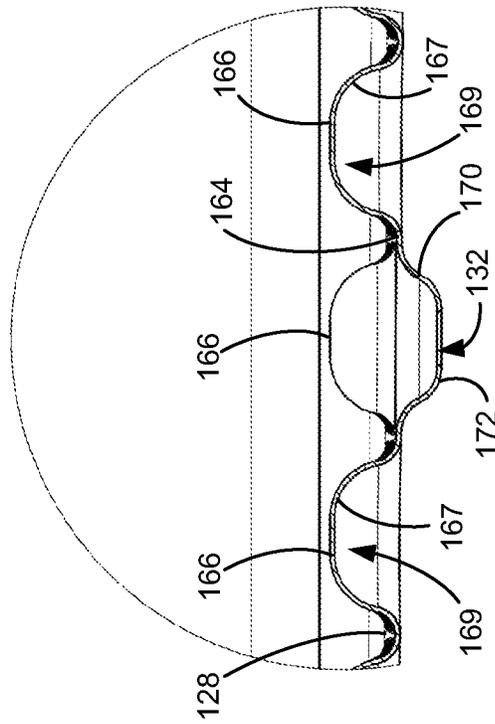


FIG. 5

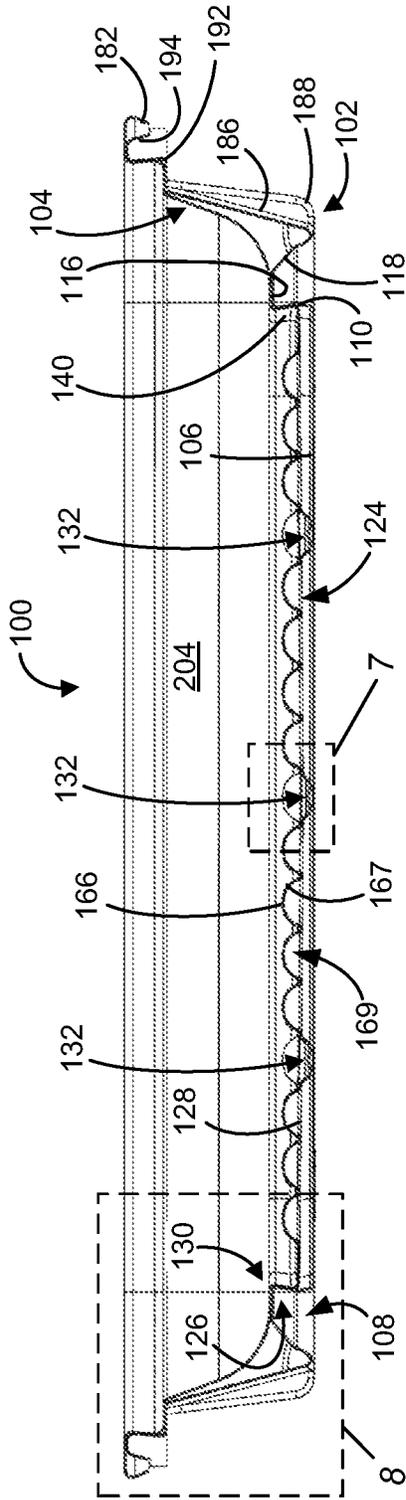


FIG. 6

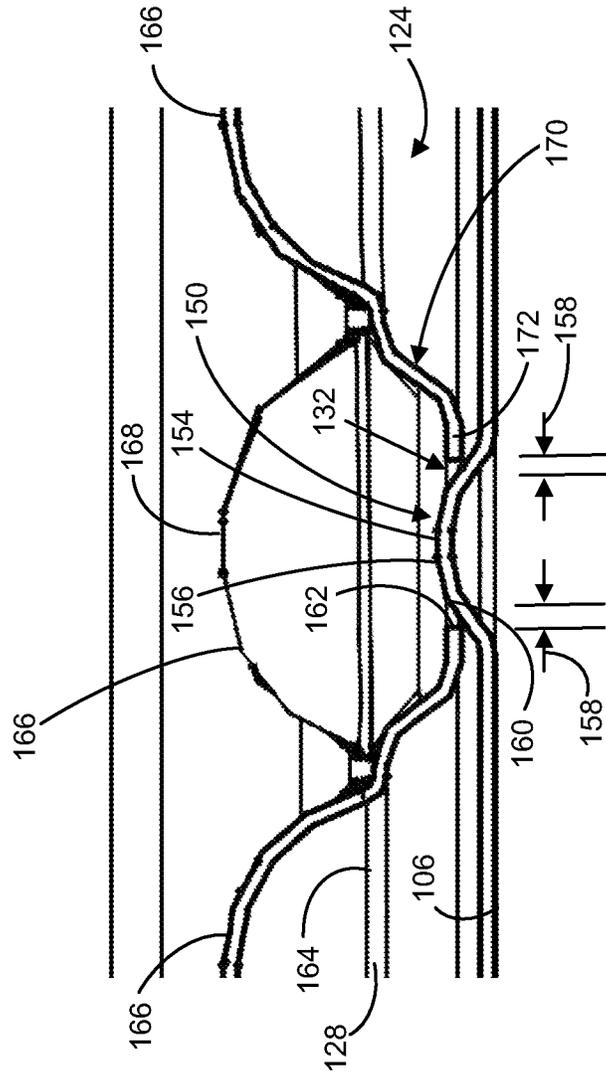


FIG. 7

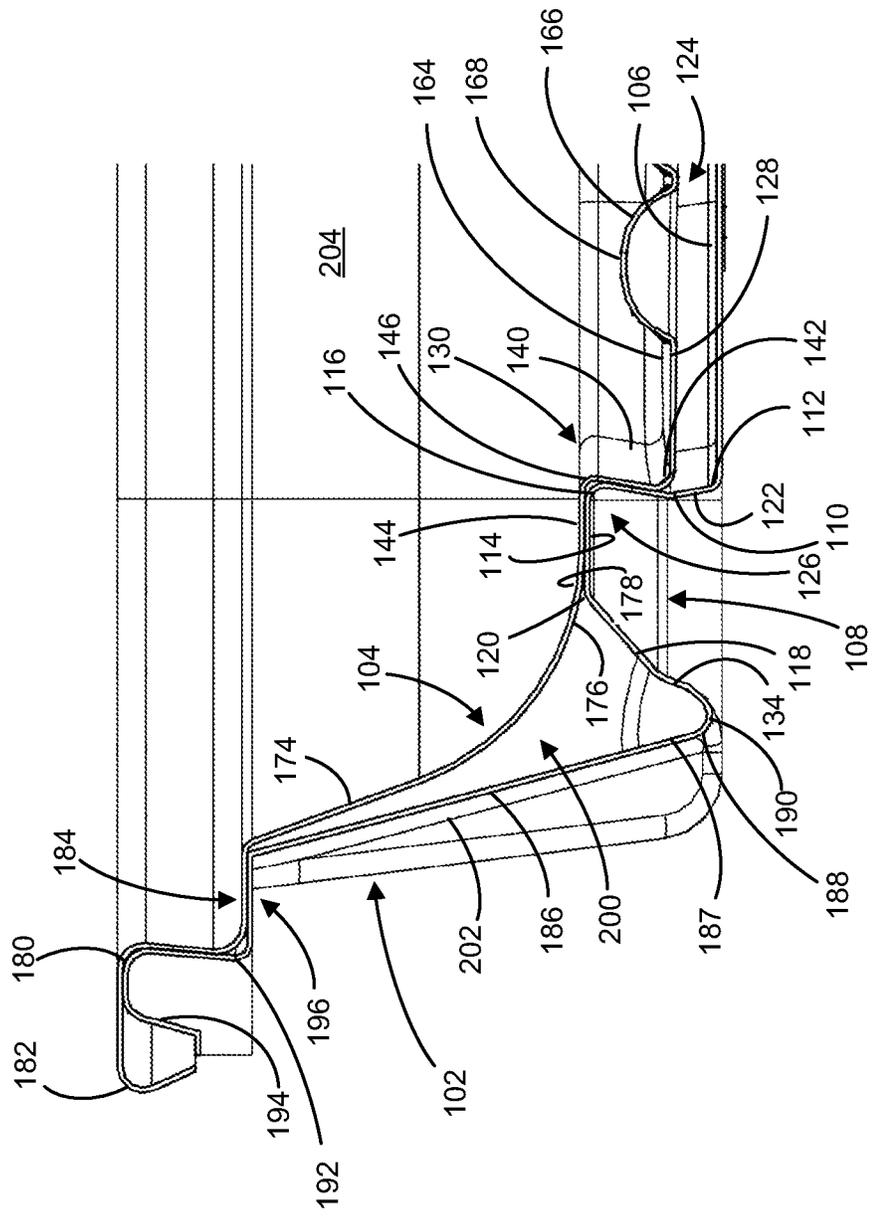


FIG. 8

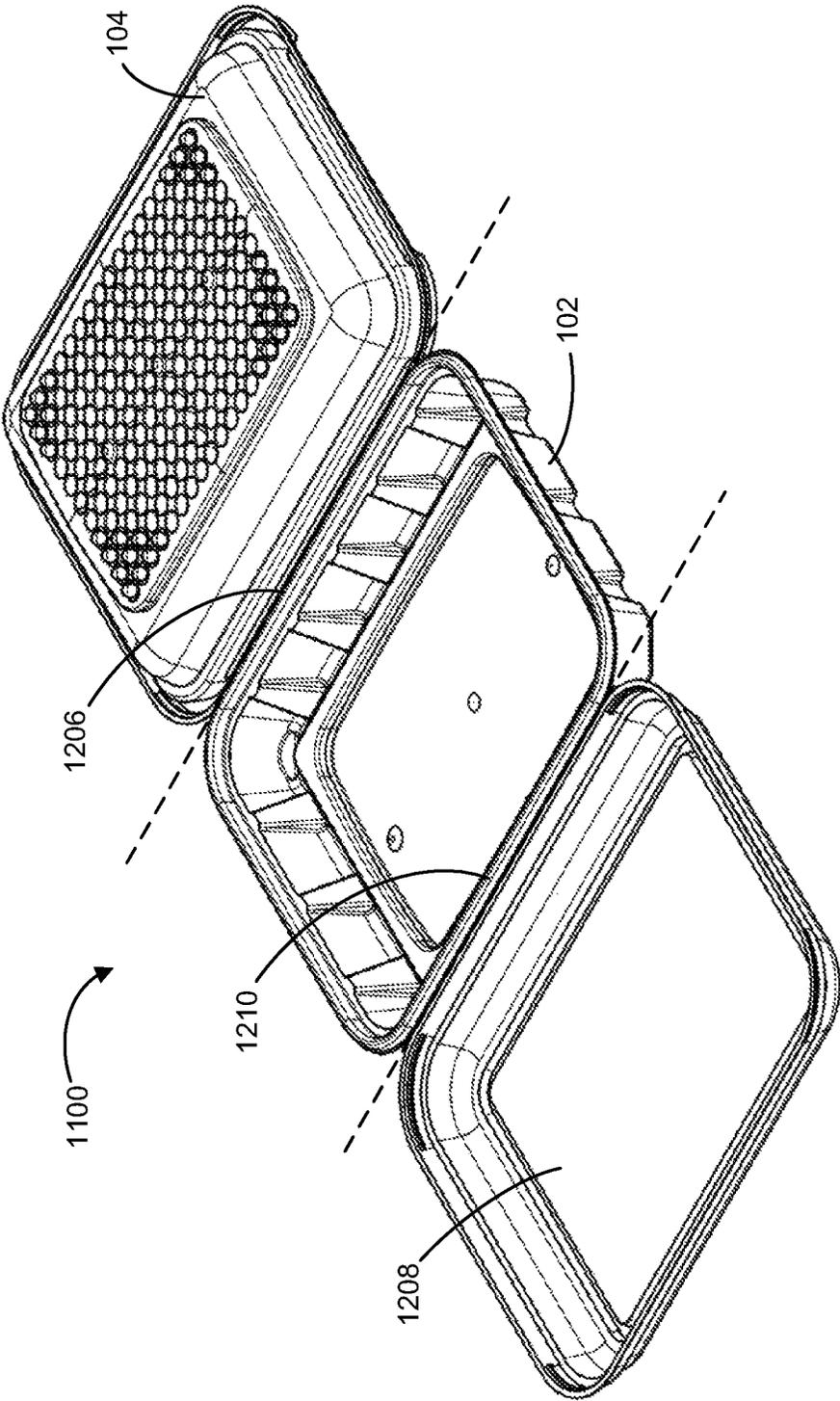


FIG. 9

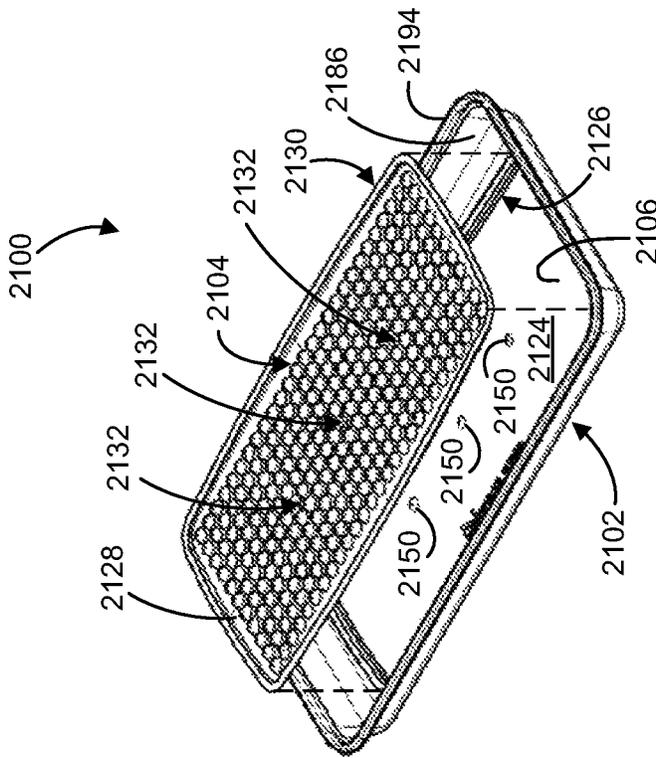


FIG. 11

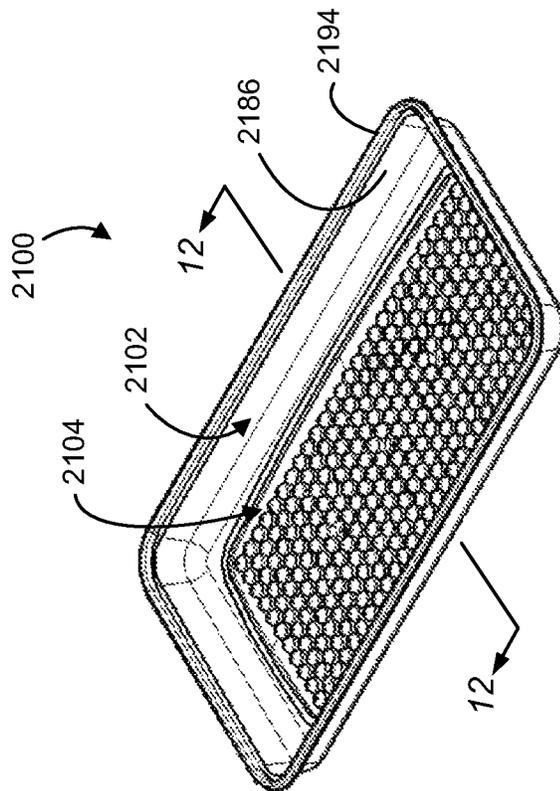


FIG. 10

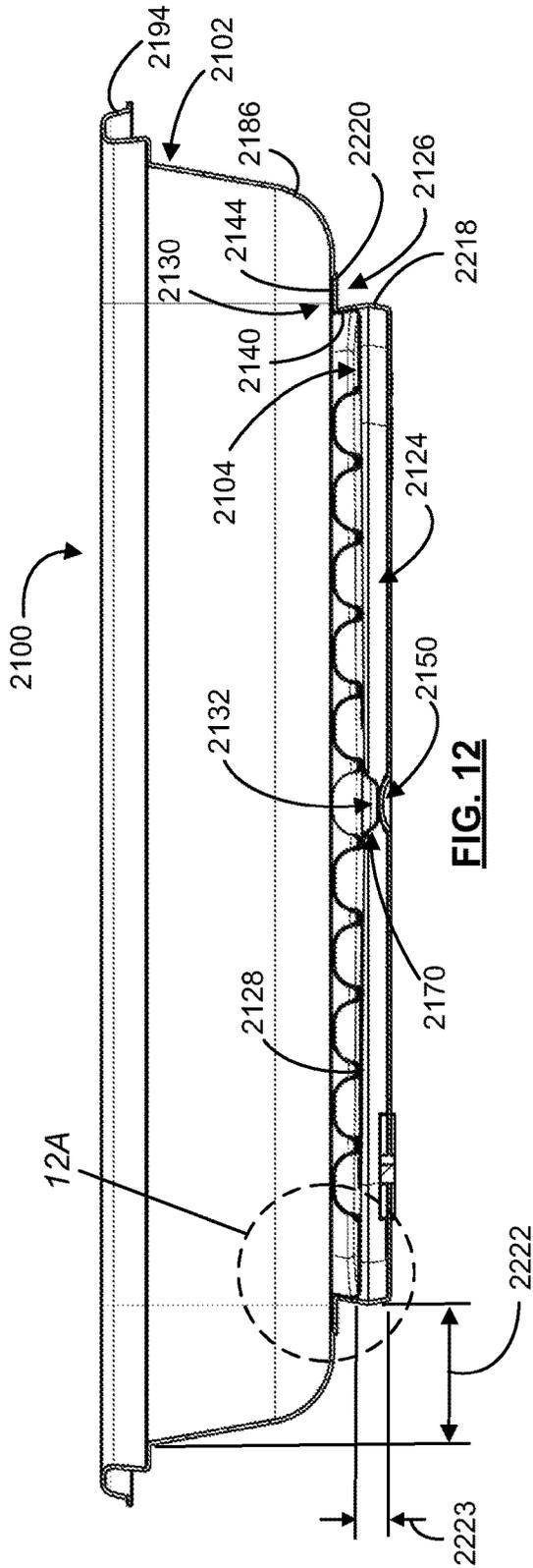


FIG. 12

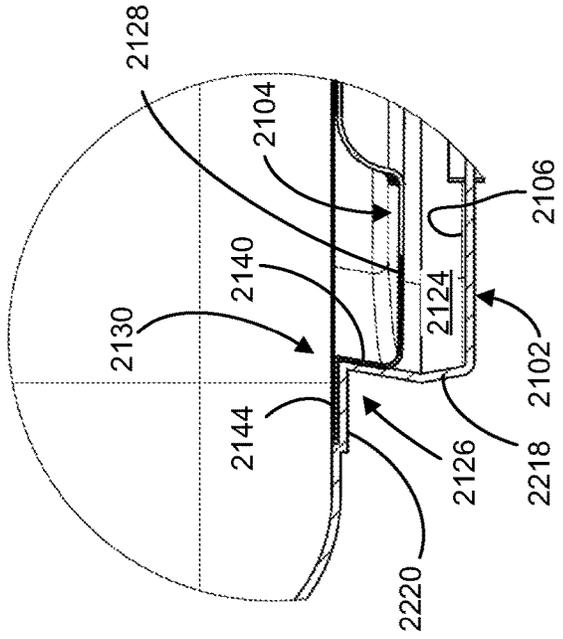


FIG. 12A

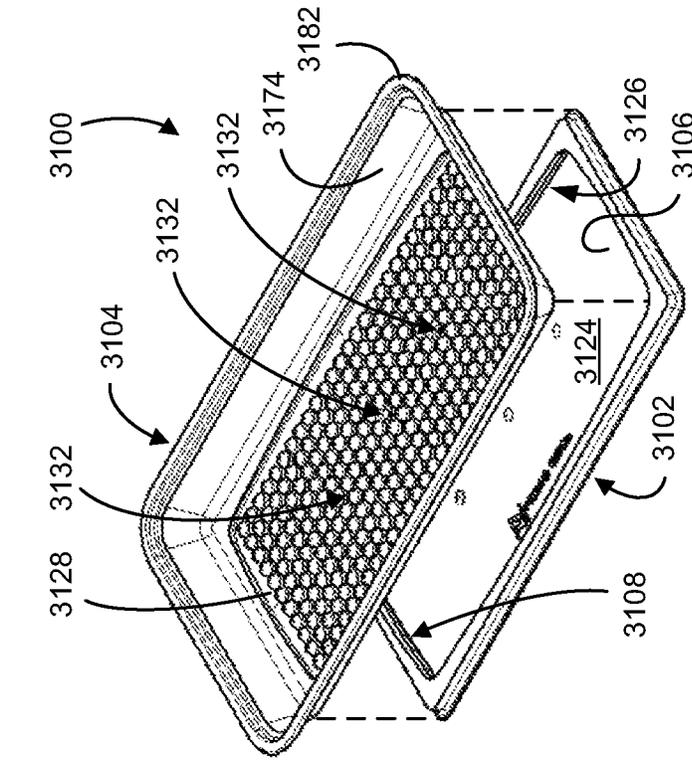


FIG. 13

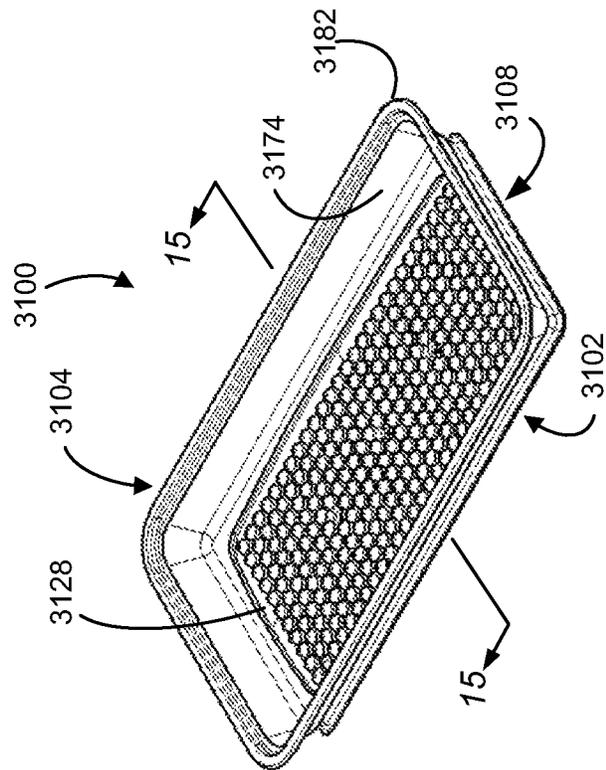
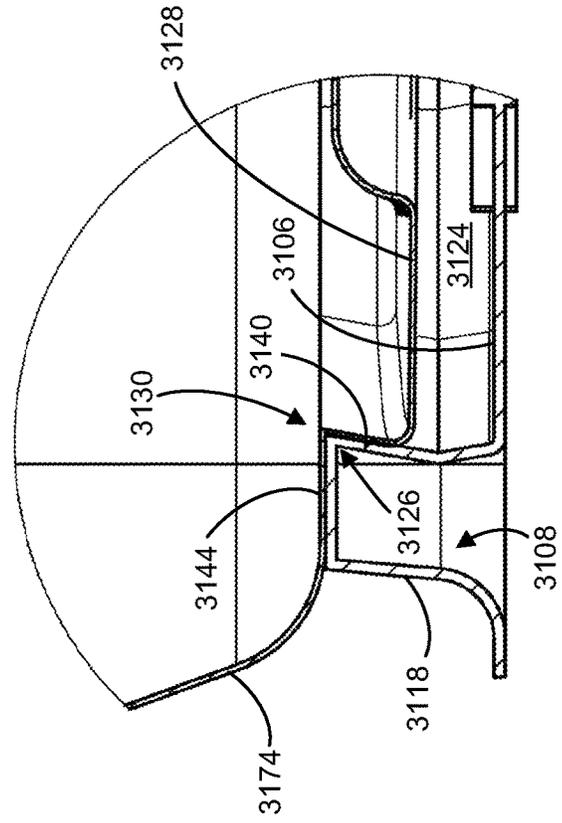
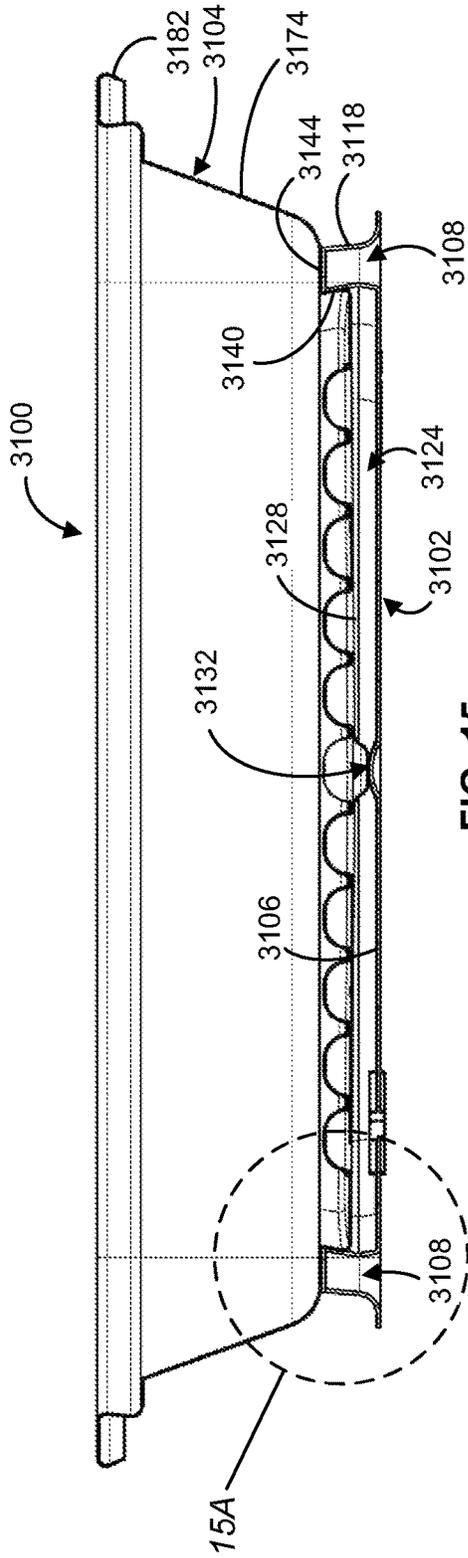


FIG. 14



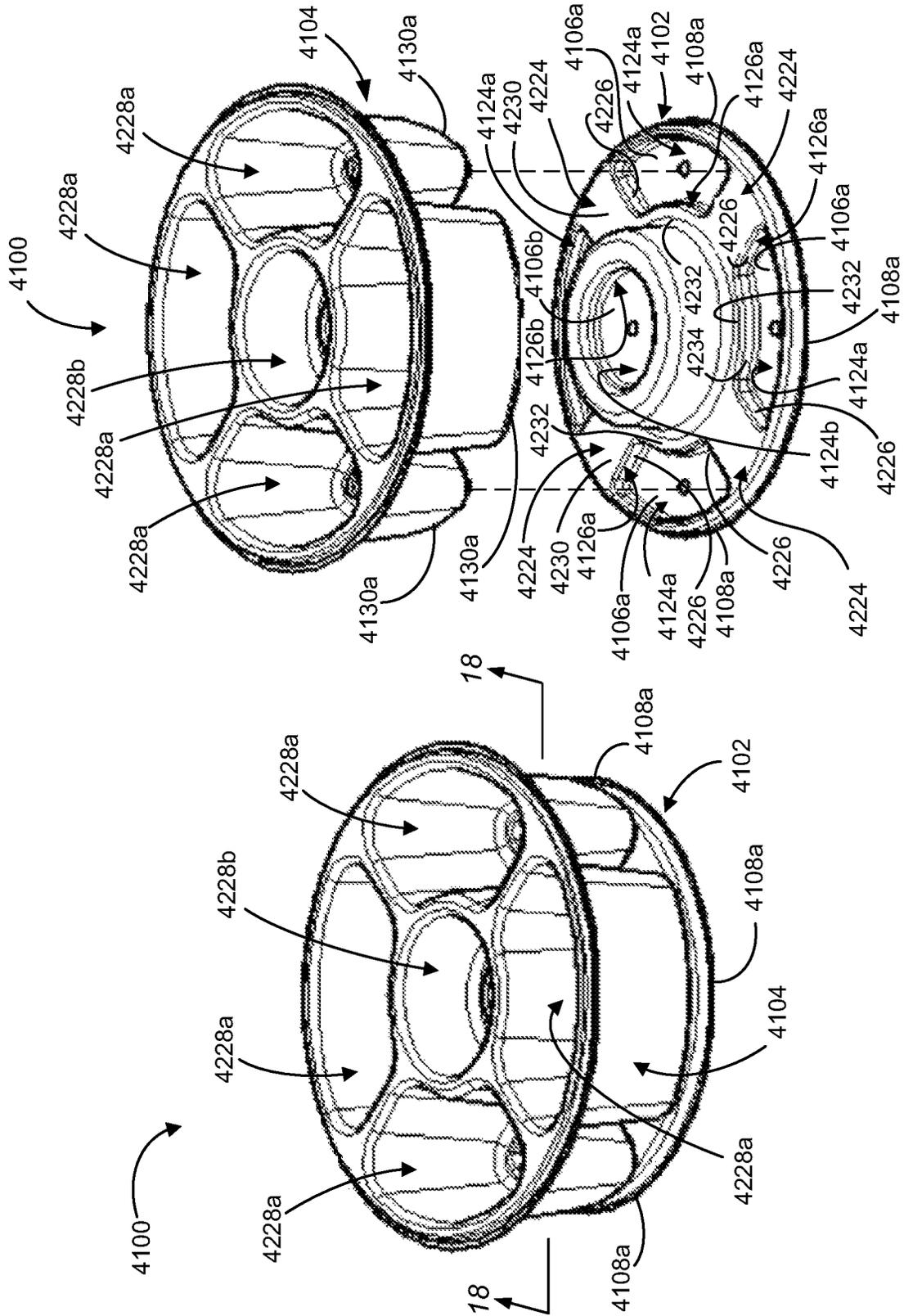


FIG. 17

FIG. 16

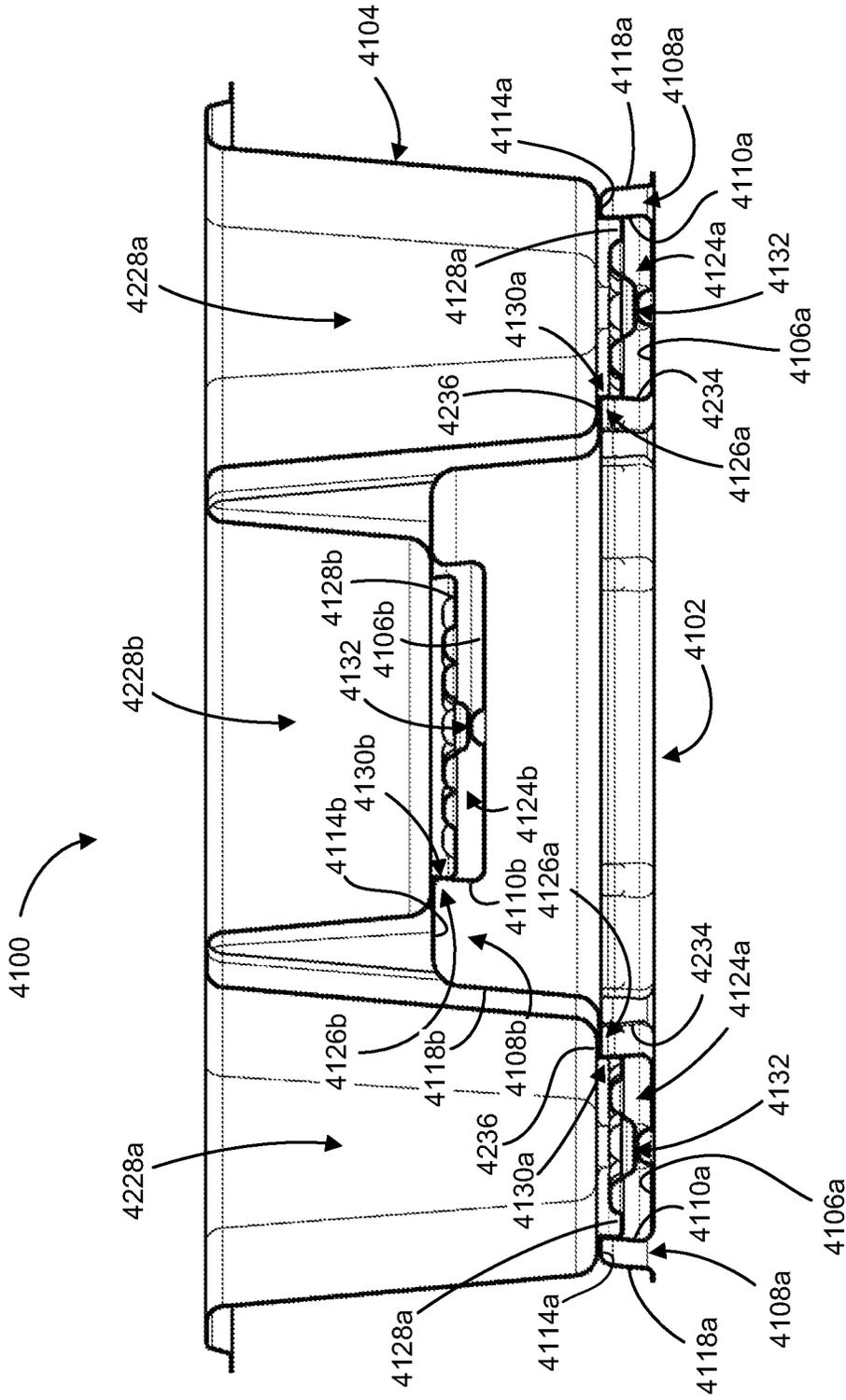


FIG. 18

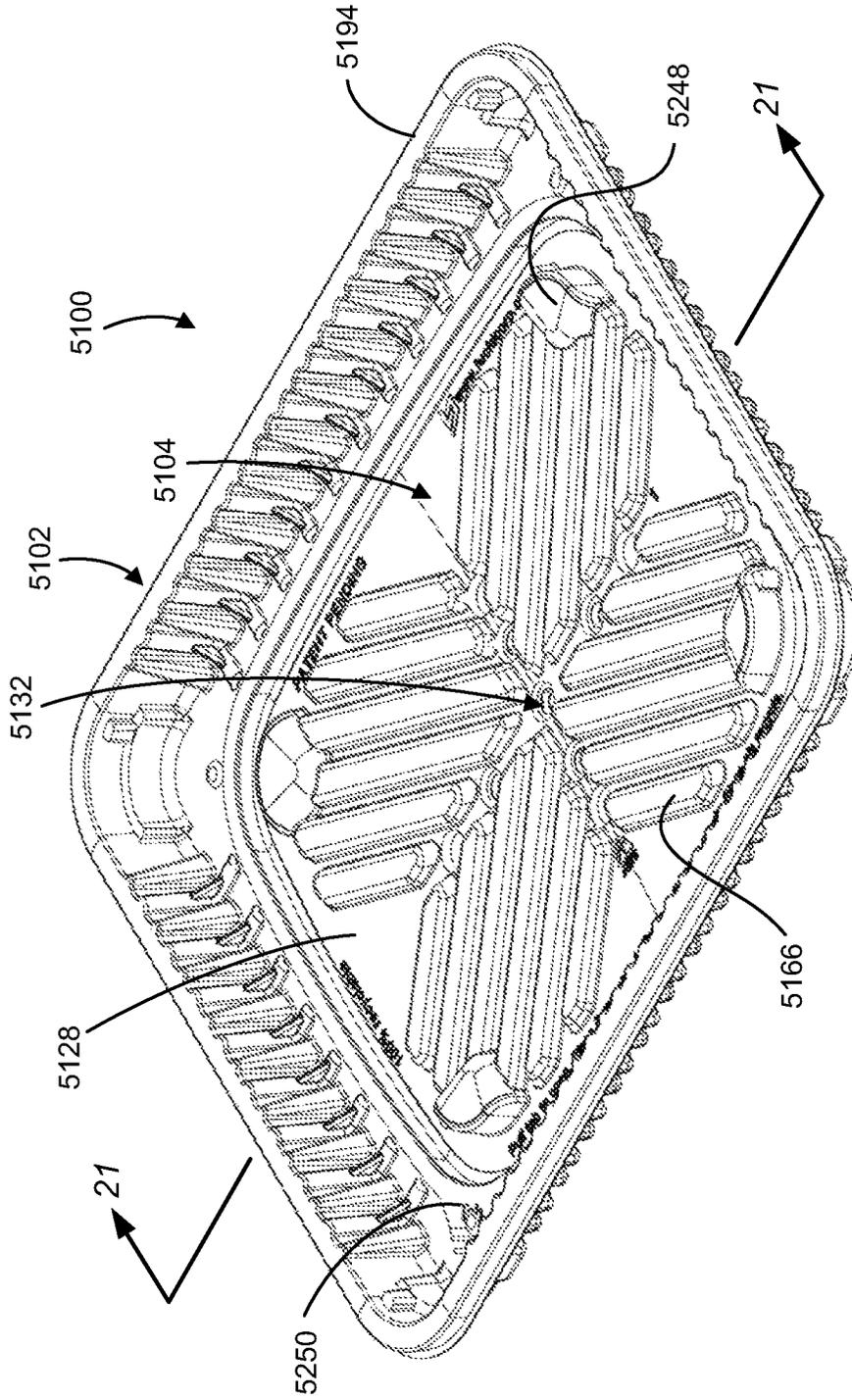


FIG. 19

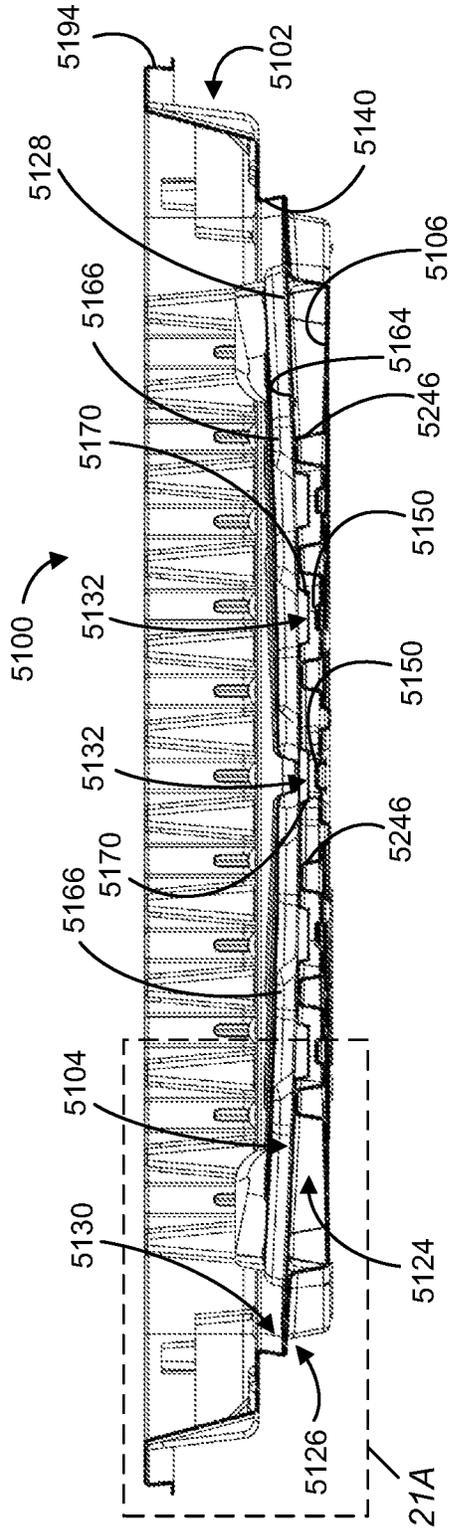


FIG. 21

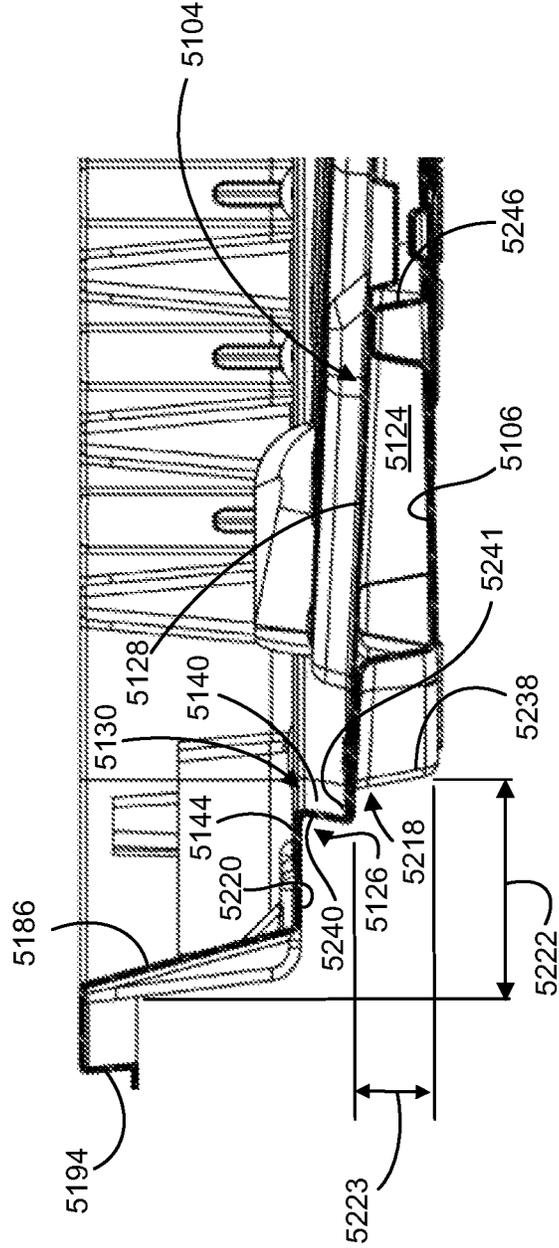


FIG. 21A

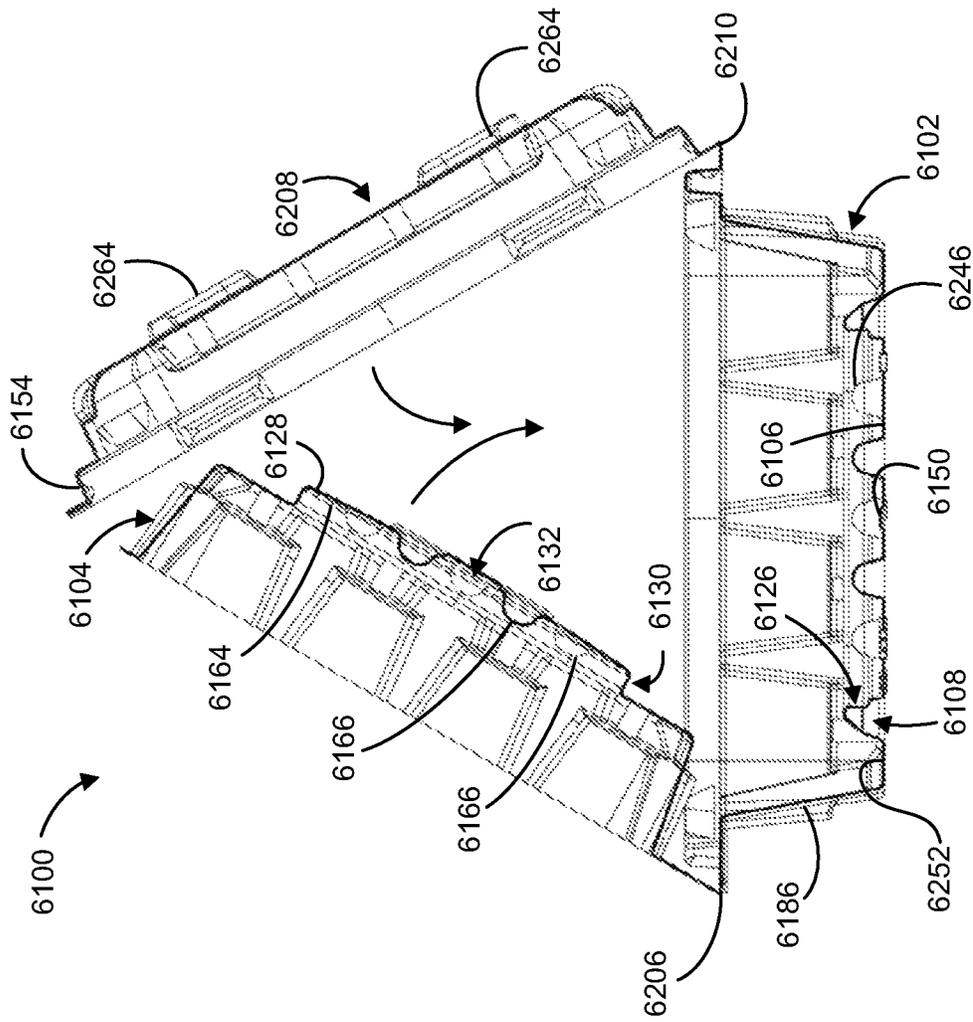


FIG. 23

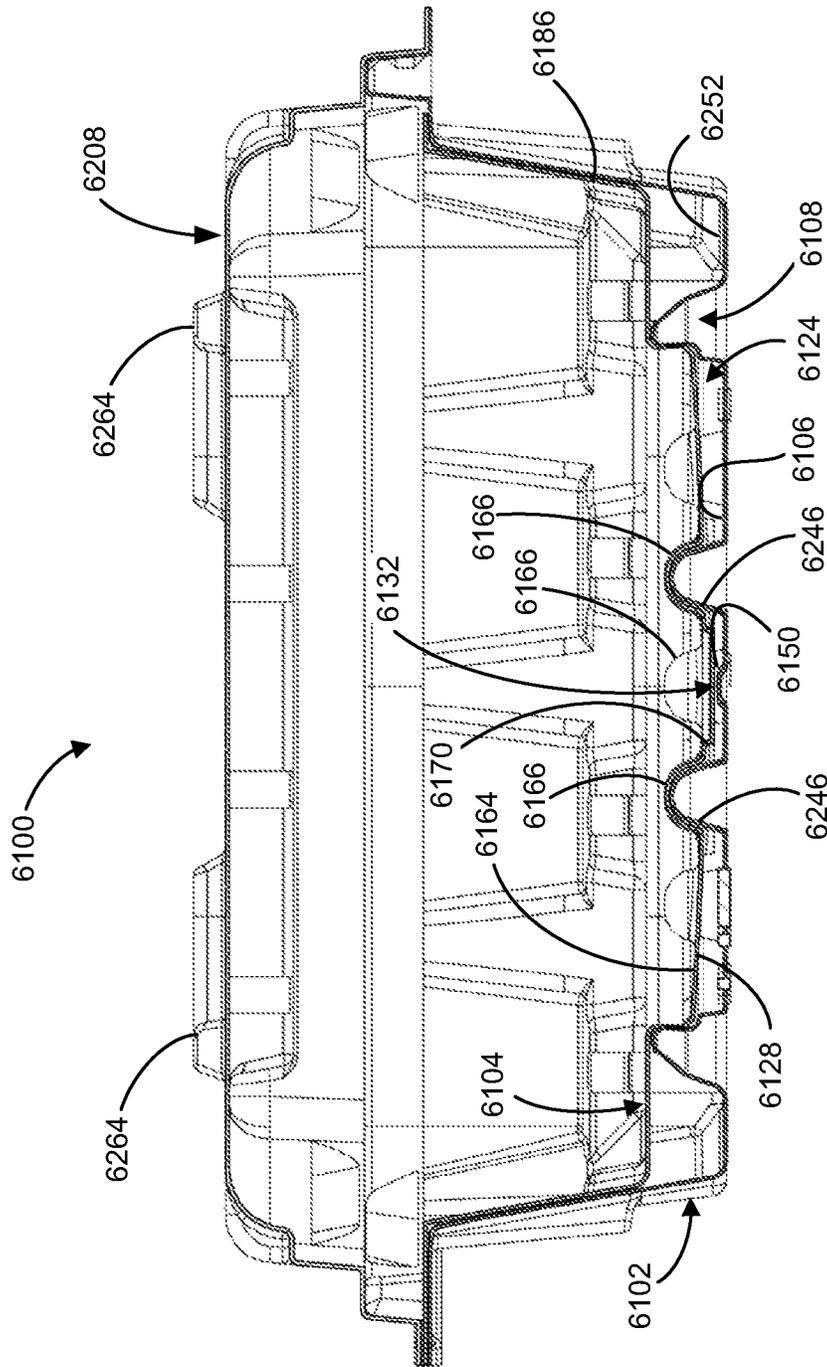


FIG. 24

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CONTAINER FOR FOOD PRESERVATION AND PRESENTATION

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a continuation of International Application No. PCT/CA2023/051326, filed Oct. 6, 2023, which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 63/414,271 filed Oct. 7, 2022, the entirety of each of which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD

The teaching disclosed herein relates to containers for food items, and in particular to containers that include a reservoir to collect liquid exuded by the food item(s) held therein.

INTRODUCTION

U.S. Pat. No. 5,705,213 (Guillin) discloses a package for the packaging and the preservation of fresh food, such as meat, sea products and the like. The package is of the type which includes a tray upon which the fresh food product is placed, and a thermoretractable thin sheet of film material for overlapping the food product contained in the tray. The tray includes a relatively rigid and impermeable first container portion and a second container portion upon which the fresh food product rests. The second container portion is fitted in the first container portion, and includes apertures which allows for the passage of fluid which may be exuded by the fresh food product. The second container portion rests on corrugations or ribs of the first container portion to define a desired number of closed chambers, characterized that in order to allow an isostatic rigidification of the first container portion, and a controlled collecting of the fluids exuded by the fresh food product into the chambers, the ribs are distributed according to at least one network of approximately parallel ribs. Each of the ribs extends at least along two directions so that each of the points of the rib is directed to resist a corresponding component of the peripheral stresses caused by the film material which overwraps the package.

U.S. Pat. No. 7,921,992 (LaRue et al.) discloses a container that includes a first tray, and a second tray disposed within the space of the first tray to define a reservoir therebetween. The first tray has a first bottom wall and a surrounding first sidewall, which extends generally upwardly from the first bottom wall to define a space therein. The second tray has a second bottom wall and a surrounding second sidewall, which also extends generally upwardly from the second bottom wall. The second bottom wall has at least one aperture defined in a central region thereof, and also has an upper surface, which slopes downwardly toward the at least one aperture. The reservoir defined between the first and second trays is in fluid communication with the aperture.

U.S. Pat. No. 10,414,571 (Wallace) relates to containers and other shaped articles (e.g., trays and dishes) for containing articles such as food products (e.g., cuts of meat and poultry) or liquid-sensitive electronic parts. In one aspect, the container has a reservoir portion into which liquid can be sequestered. In another aspect, the container includes a thermoformable substrate, a liner, and a lidding material, the lidding and the liner defining a compartment for containing articles. The compartment can be detached from the sub-

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strate by detaching the liner from the substrate without necessarily rupturing the compartment. A substantial portion of the containers described can be recycled by separating the liner and/or lidding from the substrate. The disclosure also relates to methods of making thermoformed articles having multiple layers that do not rely on use of a coextruded or other composite thermoplastic-containing substrate.

SUMMARY

The following summary is intended to introduce the reader to various aspects of the applicant's teaching, but not to define any invention.

In one aspect, a container for food items is disclosed. The container includes a base and an insert. The base is formed of transparent plastic and includes a reservoir bottom panel and a peripheral bead. The peripheral bead has a bead inner sidewall extending about and upward from a perimeter of the reservoir bottom panel, a bead top wall extending laterally outward from an upper end of the bead inner sidewall, and a bead outer sidewall extending downward from a laterally outer edge of the bead top wall. At least a lower portion of the bead inner sidewall and the reservoir bottom panel enclose, laterally and from below, a liquid collection reservoir. The base includes a base lower peripheral engagement surface extending about the liquid collection reservoir. The insert is formed of plastic and includes a support panel having an insert lower peripheral engagement surface. The insert lower peripheral engagement surface is releasably inter-lockable with the base lower peripheral engagement surface to assemble the insert to the base with the support panel overlying the liquid collection reservoir. The support panel has at least one drain aperture for draining liquid from above into the liquid collection reservoir. At least a portion of the bead outer sidewall is at an equal elevation with, and spaced laterally outward from, the lower portion of the bead inner sidewall to impede visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir.

In some examples, the base lower peripheral engagement surface includes at least a portion of the bead inner sidewall.

In some examples, the base lower peripheral engagement surface includes at least a portion of the bead top wall.

In some examples, the insert includes an insert lower sidewall extending upward from a panel perimeter of the support panel, and further includes an insert lower flange extending laterally outward from an upper end of the insert lower sidewall.

In some examples, the insert lower flange bears against the bead top wall when the insert and the base are assembled together.

In some examples, the insert lower peripheral engagement surface includes at least a portion of the insert lower sidewall.

In some examples, the base includes a flow regulator for each drain aperture of the insert. The flow regulator projects upward from the reservoir bottom panel and is aligned with the drain aperture when the insert is assembled to the base. The flow regulator occludes a central portion of the drain aperture to regulate liquid flow through the drain aperture and to inhibit reverse flow of liquid from the liquid collection reservoir back through the drain aperture when the container is tilted or inverted.

In some examples, an upper portion of the flow regulator protrudes through the drain aperture.

In some examples, the drain aperture is circular, and the flow regulator includes a rounded upwardly projecting bulge concentric with the drain aperture.

In some examples, an annular flow gap is provided between an outer surface of the flow regulator and an inner surface of the drain aperture.

In some examples, the support panel includes a panel upper surface and a plurality of spaced apart risers projecting upward from the panel upper surface. The risers each have a riser top surface spaced above the panel upper surface for holding food items in the container above the panel upper surface and facilitating flow of liquid from the food items along the panel upper surface between the risers and to the drain aperture.

In some examples, the support panel includes a depression associated with each drain aperture. The depression has a lowered central wall with an upwardly directed surface that is lower than the panel upper surface adjacent the depression. The drain aperture extends through the central wall of the depression.

In some examples, the insert includes an insert upper sidewall having an insert upper sidewall first end joined to an outer edge of the flange and an insert upper sidewall second end spaced vertically above the insert upper sidewall first end.

In some examples, the insert upper sidewall includes an insert rim formed at the insert upper sidewall second end. The insert rim may be rounded to facilitate tear-free engagement with a film wrapped over the container to preserve freshness of the food items.

In some examples, the insert upper sidewall second end includes an insert upper peripheral engagement surface extending about the container.

In some examples, the base includes a base sidewall having a base sidewall first end joined to a lower end of the bead outer sidewall, and a base sidewall second end spaced vertically above the base sidewall first end.

In some examples, the base sidewall second end includes a base rim. The base rim may be rounded to facilitate tear-free engagement with a film wrapped over the container to preserve freshness of the food items.

In some examples, the base sidewall second end includes a base upper peripheral engagement surface extending about the container.

In some examples, the insert includes an insert upper sidewall having an insert upper sidewall first end joined to an outer edge of the flange, and an insert upper peripheral engagement surface extending about the container along an insert upper sidewall second end spaced above the insert upper sidewall first end.

In some examples, the base includes a base sidewall having a base sidewall first end joined to a lower end of the bead outer wall, and a base upper peripheral engagement surface extending about the container along a base sidewall second end spaced vertically above the base sidewall first end. At least a portion of the base sidewall between the base sidewall first end and the base sidewall second end is disposed laterally outwardly of the insert upper sidewall when the insert is assembled to the base.

In some examples, the insert upper peripheral engagement surface is releasably inter-lockable with the base upper peripheral engagement surface when the insert is assembled to the base. A sealed chamber extends vertically between the interlocked upper and lower peripheral engagement surfaces of the base and insert, and about a periphery of the container. The sealed chamber provides a thermal break between an outer surface of the base sidewall and an interior of the container.

In some examples, the base and the insert are formed from a single sheet of plastic and connected together along

respective first edges of the base and the insert by a first living hinge, and assembly of the insert onto the base includes pivoting the insert relative to the base about the living hinge.

In some examples, the container includes a lid that is releasably engageable with a rim of at least one of the base and the insert.

In some examples, the lid is formed from the single sheet of plastic together with the base and the insert, and the lid is connected to the base along a second edge of the base by a second living hinge.

In another aspect, a container for food items is disclosed. The container includes a base and an insert. The base is formed of transparent plastic and includes a reservoir bottom panel and a reservoir sidewall. The reservoir sidewall extends about and upward from a perimeter of the reservoir bottom panel. The base further includes a shoulder extending laterally outward from an upper end of the reservoir sidewall, and an upper sidewall extending upward from a laterally outer edge of the shoulder. At least a lower portion of the reservoir sidewall and the reservoir bottom panel enclosing, laterally and from below, a liquid collection reservoir. The base further includes a base lower peripheral engagement surface extending about the liquid collection reservoir. The insert is formed of plastic and includes a support panel having an insert lower peripheral engagement surface. The insert lower peripheral engagement surface is releasably inter-lockable with the base lower peripheral engagement surface to assemble the insert to the base with the support panel overlying the liquid collection reservoir. The support panel has at least one drain aperture for draining liquid from above into the liquid collection reservoir. At least the lower portion of the reservoir sidewall is spaced laterally inwardly from the upper sidewall by a lateral distance at least as great as a vertical distance of the lower portion of the reservoir sidewall extending between the reservoir bottom panel and an underside surface of the insert when assembled to the base to impede visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir.

In some examples, the reservoir sidewall includes an upper portion disposed laterally outward of the lower portion and connected to the lower portion by a generally horizontal step surface, the step surface engaging the underside surface of the insert when the insert is assembled onto the base.

In some examples, the upper portion of the reservoir sidewall extends downward from the base shoulder to a laterally outer edge of the step surface, and the lower portion of the reservoir sidewall extends downward from a laterally inner edge of the step surface to the reservoir bottom panel.

In some examples, the insert lower engagement surface includes an underside surface of a peripheral portion of the support panel configured to bear against the step surface.

In some examples, the insert lower engagement surface includes an outer surface of the insert lower sidewall configured to bear against the upper portion of the reservoir sidewall.

Other aspects and features of the teachings disclosed herein will become apparent to those ordinarily skilled in the art, upon review of the following description of the specific examples of the present disclosure.

DRAWINGS

For a better understanding of the described examples and to show more clearly how they may be carried into effect,

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reference will now be made, by way of example, to the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an example container for food items according to aspects of the teaching disclosed herein;

FIG. 2 is an exploded perspective view of the container of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of a base of the container of FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of a portion of the base of FIG. 3 taken along line 4-4;

FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional view of a portion of the container of FIG. 2 taken along line 5-5;

FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional view of the container of FIG. 1 taken along line 6-6;

FIG. 7 is an enlarged view of a portion of the container identified at box 7 of FIG. 6;

FIG. 8 is an enlarged view of a portion of the container identified at box 8 of FIG. 6;

FIG. 9 is a perspective view of another container for food items according to aspects of the teaching disclosed herein;

FIG. 10 is a perspective view of another example container for food items according to aspects of the teaching disclosed herein;

FIG. 11 is an exploded perspective view of the container of FIG. 10;

FIG. 12 is a cross-sectional view of the container of FIG. 10 taken along line 12-12;

FIG. 12A is an enlarged view of a portion of the container identified at circle 12A of FIG. 12;

FIG. 13 is a perspective view of another example container for food items according to aspects of the teaching disclosed herein;

FIG. 14 is an exploded perspective view of the container of FIG. 13;

FIG. 15 is a cross-sectional view of the container of FIG. 13 taken along line 15-15;

FIG. 15A is an enlarged view of a portion of the container identified at circle 15A of FIG. 15;

FIG. 16 is a perspective view of another example container for food items according to aspects of the teaching disclosed herein;

FIG. 17 is an exploded perspective view of the container of FIG. 16;

FIG. 18 is a cross-sectional view of the container of FIG. 16 taken along line 18-18;

FIG. 19 is a perspective view of another container for food items according to aspects of the teaching disclosed herein;

FIG. 20 is an exploded perspective view of the container of FIG. 19;

FIG. 21 is a cross-sectional view of the container of FIG. 19 taken along line 21-21;

FIG. 21A is an enlarged view of a portion of the container identified at box 21A of FIG. 21;

FIG. 22 is a perspective view of another container for food items according to aspects of the teaching disclosed herein;

FIG. 23 is a cross-sectional view of the container of FIG. 22 in a partially assembled configuration; and

FIG. 24 is a cross-sectional view of the container of FIG. 22 in a fully closed configuration.

The drawings included herewith are for illustrating various examples of apparatuses and methods of the teaching of

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the present specification and are not intended to limit the scope of what is taught in any way.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Various apparatuses or processes will be described below to provide an example of each claimed invention. No example described below limits any claimed invention and any claimed invention may cover processes or apparatuses that differ from those described below. The claimed inventions are not limited to apparatuses or processes having all of the features of any one apparatus or process described below or to features common to multiple or all of the apparatuses described below. It is possible that an apparatus or process described below is not an example of any claimed invention. Any invention disclosed in an apparatus or process described below that is not claimed in this document may be the subject matter of another protective instrument, for example, a continuing patent application, and the applicants, inventors, or owners do not intend to abandon, disclaim, or dedicate to the public any such invention by its disclosure in this document.

Referring to FIGS. 1 and 2, a container 100 for food items in accordance with aspects of the teaching disclosed herein includes liquid management features to help better preserve food held in the container and to help the food in the container look more appealing to a potential purchaser. Some food items, such as fresh meat, fresh fruit, cut fruits or vegetables, etc., are high in moisture content and exude liquid when placed in a container for sale to an end customer. Such liquid can be damaging to the food item, for example, if the food item is in prolonged contact with the liquid. Such liquid can also be unsightly (particularly if the liquid is biological, such as blood) and makes purchasing the food item unattractive to the customer.

As disclosed in more detail subsequently herein, the container 100 mitigates these problems by providing a base 102 and an insert 104 removably attachable to the base 102. When the insert 104 is assembled onto the base 102, the container 100 provides a space above the insert 104 to hold food items, and a space below the insert 104 inside the base 102 to collect liquid exuded from the food items, such that the food items are separated from the liquid and visibility of the liquid is reduced (e.g., when the container is on display for merchandising). Need for a separate pad placed under the food item to absorb liquid is avoided, and after use the insert 104 can be removed from the base 102 to facilitate rinsing any exuded liquid, thereby promoting recyclability of the container 100.

The base 102 includes a reservoir bottom panel 106 for enclosing a liquid collection reservoir 124 (FIG. 6) from below. In the example illustrated, the base 102 further includes a peripheral bead 108 that encircles a perimeter of the reservoir bottom panel 106. The peripheral bead 108 has a bead inner sidewall 110 (FIG. 6, FIG. 8) extending about and upward from a perimeter 112 of the reservoir bottom panel 106, a bead top wall 114 extending laterally outward from an upper end 116 of the bead inner sidewall 110, and a bead outer sidewall 118 extending downward from a laterally outer edge 120 of the bead top wall 114. At least a lower portion 122 of the bead inner sidewall 110 and the reservoir bottom panel 106 enclose, laterally and from below, the liquid collection reservoir 124.

In the example illustrated, the base 102 and insert 104 are formed from plastic sheet material in a thermoforming process. The plastic sheet is, in the example illustrated, of unpigmented, transparent PET material that is readily recy-

clable. In some examples, portions of the unpigmented material can be treated (e.g., embossed) to have a frosted appearance rendering such portions translucent. In some examples, the base 102 and insert 104 are formed from a translucent or opaque plastic material. The size and shape of the container 100 can be selected to meet the requirements of the food packager. In the example illustrated, the container 100 has a generally rectangular shape.

Referring again to FIGS. 6 and 8, the base 102 includes a base lower peripheral engagement surface 126 extending about the liquid collection reservoir 124. The insert 104 includes a support panel 128 having an insert lower peripheral engagement surface 130. The insert lower peripheral engagement surface 130 is releasably inter-lockable with the base lower peripheral engagement surface 126 to assemble the insert 104 to the base 102 with the support panel 128 overlying the liquid collection reservoir 124.

In some examples, the base lower peripheral engagement surface 126 includes at least a portion of the bead inner sidewall 110. In some examples, the base lower peripheral engagement surface 126 includes at least a portion of the bead top wall 114. In the example illustrated, the base lower peripheral engagement surface 126 includes an upper portion of the bead inner sidewall 110 and a laterally inner portion of the bead top wall 114 (FIG. 8).

In the example container 100, the insert 104 includes an insert lower sidewall 140 (FIG. 8) extending upward from a panel perimeter 142 (see also FIG. 2) of the support panel 128. The insert 104, in the example illustrated, further includes an insert lower flange 144 extending laterally outward from an upper end 146 of the insert lower sidewall 140. The insert lower flange 144 bears against the bead top wall 114 when the example insert 104 and base 102 are assembled together.

In some examples, the insert lower peripheral engagement surface 130 includes at least a portion of the insert lower sidewall 140. In some examples, the insert lower peripheral engagement surface 130 includes at least a portion of the insert lower flange 144. In the example illustrated, the insert lower peripheral engagement surface 130 includes at least an upper portion 148 of the insert lower sidewall 140 and a laterally inner portion 149 of the insert lower flange 144.

In the example illustrated, snap-fit interlocking assembly of the base and insert lower peripheral engagement surfaces 126, 130 is facilitated by having the upper end of the bead inner sidewall 110 define (or bound) an opening that is slightly smaller than a footprint defined by the lower edge of the insert lower sidewall 140. To assemble the insert 104 onto the base 102, the lower edge of the insert lower sidewall 140 can be pressed vertically downward (as viewed in FIG. 8) against the base 102 and urged past the upper end of the bead inner sidewall 110, resiliently deforming the respective surfaces of the insert and base, until the surfaces pass one another and the bead inner sidewall 110 and the insert lower sidewall 140 snap back toward their undeformed state. Some resilient compressive forces remain upon assembly, so that a generally fluid-tight seal is provided by the interlocking engagement of the lower peripheral engagement surfaces 126, 130.

In the example illustrated, at least a portion 134 of the bead outer sidewall 118 is at equal elevation with, and spaced laterally outward from, the lower portion 122 of the bead inner sidewall 110 (FIG. 8). Spacing the bead outer sidewall 118 laterally outwardly from the bead inner sidewall 110 provides a gap that spaces the liquid collection reservoir 124 further laterally inward than would be the case without such gap. The gap can provide a thermal break

between the bead outer sidewall 118 and the liquid collection reservoir 124, which can, for example, help protect a user's hand from hot or cold temperatures associated with handling the container when filled with hot or cold contents. The bead outer sidewall 118 positioned laterally outward of the bead inner sidewall 110 additionally or alternatively can help to conceal liquid in the liquid collection reservoir 124 by impeding visual access to such liquid.

Referring again to FIG. 8, in the example illustrated, the bead inner sidewall 110 extends vertically upward from the reservoir bottom panel to the bead top wall 114, and the lower portion 122 of the bead inner sidewall 110 spans an elevation extending upward from the reservoir bottom panel 106 to the lower end of the insert lower sidewall 140. The bead outer sidewall 118 extends at an incline (at about 45 degrees, in the example illustrated) downward and laterally outward from the bead top wall 114 to an elevation generally equal to that of the reservoir bottom panel 106. The lower portion 134 of the bead outer sidewall 118 spans the same elevation as the lower portion 122 of the bead inner sidewall 110, namely, the elevation extending upward from the reservoir bottom panel 106 to the lower end of the insert lower sidewall 140. In the example illustrated, the base 102 is formed of transparent plastic, and a single transparent sidewall such as the bead inner sidewall 110 does little to prevent visual access of liquid bearing there against. The bead outer sidewall 118, as described in the example illustrated, positions the reservoir inwardly of an outer periphery of the container 100 and provides a second wall in a line of sight that, as taught by the inventors, can significantly impede visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir 124. In the example illustrated, the base 102 includes an optional base sidewall 186 (described in more detail subsequently herein) that further impedes visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir 124.

Referring again to FIG. 1, the support panel 128 has at least one drain aperture 132 for draining liquid from above into the liquid collection reservoir 124. In the example illustrated, the support panel 128 has three drain apertures 132. The three drain apertures 132 are, in the example illustrated, spaced apart along a longitudinal centerline of the support panel 128. The number of drain apertures 132 included in the support panel 128 may vary depending upon the size of the container 100. For example, a larger container 100 may include more drain apertures 132 than a smaller container 100.

In some examples, the support panel 128 may be contoured to promote liquid flow along the panel upper surface 164 to one or more of the drain apertures 132. In the example illustrated, an elevation of the support panel 128 proximate the insert lower sidewall 140 is higher than an elevation of the support panel 128 at the drain apertures 132 (FIG. 6). Such a configuration facilitates the flow of exuded liquid along the panel upper surface 164 to the drain apertures 132 (FIG. 7). In cases where the container 100 is inverted, such a configuration may also impede the collected liquid from flowing along a lower surface of the support panel 128 to the one or more drain apertures 132 (i.e., because the lower panel surface slopes away from the drain apertures 132 when the container 100 is inverted).

The base 102, in the example illustrated, includes a flow regulator 150 for each drain aperture 132 of the insert 104 (FIG. 2). With reference to FIG. 7, the flow regulator 150 projects upward from the reservoir bottom panel 106 and is aligned with the drain aperture 132 when the insert 104 is assembled to the base 102. The flow regulator 150 occludes a central portion of the drain aperture 132 to regulate liquid

flow through the drain aperture 132 and to further help inhibit reverse flow of liquid from the liquid collection reservoir 124 back through the drain aperture 132 when the container 100 is tilted or inverted.

In the example illustrated, an upper portion 154 of the flow regulator 150 protrudes through the drain aperture 132 (FIG. 7). In the example illustrated, the drain aperture 132 is circular and the flow regulator 150 includes a rounded upwardly projecting bulge 156 concentric with the drain aperture 132. An annular flow gap 158 is, in the example illustrated, provided between an outer surface 160 of the flow regulator 150 and an inner surface 162 of the drain aperture 132.

In the example illustrated, the support panel 128 includes a panel upper surface 164 and a plurality of spaced-apart risers 166 projecting upward from the panel upper surface 164 (FIGS. 2 and 5). The risers 166 each have a riser top surface 168 (FIG. 5) spaced above the panel upper surface 164 for holding food items in the container 100 above the panel upper surface 164 and facilitating flow of liquid from the food items along the panel upper surface 164 between the risers 166 and to the drain apertures 132. In the example illustrated, the panel upper surface 164 between the risers 166 is generally flat and inclined toward the drain apertures 132. The top surface 168 of each riser 166 is, in the example illustrated, rounded to facilitate drainage from the food item to the panel upper surface 164.

In the example illustrated, the risers 166 have hollow interiors 169 bounded at least in part by concave inner surfaces 167 (FIG. 5). The inner surfaces 167 of the risers are directed toward the reservoir bottom panel 106 and form a ceiling of the liquid collection reservoir 124 (FIG. 6). In cases where the container 100 may be inverted or near-inverted, such as, for example, during handling by a potential purchaser, liquid can collect in the riser interiors 169 which can help prevent liquid from flowing in reverse through the drain apertures 132, from the (inverted) liquid collection reservoir 124 back toward the food item in the container 100.

In the example illustrated, the support panel 128 includes a depression 170 associated with each drain aperture 132 (FIGS. 5 and 7). In the example illustrated, each depression 170 has a lowered central wall 172 with an upward facing surface that is lower than the panel upper surface 164 adjacent the depression 170 (FIG. 7). The drain aperture 132, in the example illustrated, extends through the lowered central wall 172 of the depression 170. This configuration increases a vertical spacing between the drain aperture 132 and the panel upper surface 164 of the support panel 128 of the insert 104. The depressions 170 can facilitate the draining process. For example, in cases where a volume of liquid is exuded at a rate faster than the rate through which the liquid can pass through the drain aperture 132, the depressions 170 can serve as overflow basins. Furthermore, the depressions 170 can help prevent backflow of liquid through the drain aperture 132 from the liquid collection reservoir 124 toward the food item. For example, in cases where the container 100 may be inverted, the elevation of the drain aperture 132 is spaced above the panel upper surface 164 (and further above the riser inner surfaces 167), making it less likely that the liquid would pass back through the drain apertures 132.

Referring again to FIGS. 6 and 8, in the example illustrated, the insert 104 includes an insert upper sidewall 174 having an insert upper sidewall first end 176 joined to an outer edge 178 of the flange 144 and an insert upper sidewall second end 180 spaced vertically above the insert upper

sidewall first end 176 (FIG. 8). The insert upper sidewall 174, in the example illustrated, includes an insert rim 182 formed at the insert upper sidewall second end 180. The insert rim 182 may be rounded to facilitate tear-free engagement with a film wrapped over the container 100 to preserve freshness of the food items.

With reference to FIGS. 6 and 8, the insert upper sidewall second end 180 includes an insert upper peripheral engagement surface 184 extending about the container 100. In the example illustrated, the insert upper peripheral engagement surface 184 extends about the container 100 along the insert upper sidewall second end 180.

In the example illustrated, the base 102 includes a base sidewall 186 having a base sidewall first end 188 joined to a lower end 190 of the bead outer sidewall 118, and a base sidewall second end 192 spaced vertically above the base sidewall first end 188 (FIG. 8).

The base sidewall second end 192 includes a base rim 194. The base rim 194 may be rounded or otherwise cooperate with the rounded insert rim 182 to facilitate tear-free engagement with film wrapped over the container 100.

With reference to FIGS. 6 and 8, the base sidewall second end 192 includes a base upper peripheral engagement surface 196 extending about the container 100. In the example illustrated, the base upper peripheral engagement surface 196 extends about the container 100 along the base sidewall second end 192.

In the example illustrated, a portion of the base sidewall 186 between the base sidewall first end 188 and the base sidewall second end 192 is disposed laterally outwardly of the bead outer sidewall 118 when the insert 104 is assembled to the base 102 (FIG. 8). In the example illustrated, a lower portion 187 of the base sidewall 186 is at equal elevation with, and spaced laterally outward from, the lower portion 122 of the bead inner sidewall 110, which further impedes visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir 124. In some examples, the lower portion 187 of the base sidewall 186 is translucent or opaque to further impede visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir 124.

The insert upper peripheral engagement surface 184 is releasably inter-lockable with the base upper peripheral engagement surface 196 when the insert 104 is assembled to the base 102. In the example illustrated, a sealed chamber 200 extends between the interlocked upper peripheral engagement surfaces 184, 196 and the interlocked lower peripheral engagement surfaces 126, 130, and about the container 100. The sealed chamber 200 provides a thermal break between an outer surface 202 of the base sidewall 186 and an interior 204 of the container 100 (FIG. 8). This can help insulate heated or cooled food items in the container from the environment so that the food items hold their desired temperature for a longer period of time. The sealed chamber 200 can also help prevent liquid from leaking out of the container 100, for example, in instances where the container is inverted or turned on its side. More particularly, in some instances, the interlocked engagement between the base and insert upper peripheral engagement surfaces 196, 184 and the interlocked engagement between the base and insert lower peripheral engagement surfaces 126, 130 contribute to preventing liquid from leaking out of the container 100.

In use, the insert 104 is assembled onto the base 102 by pressing the insert lower peripheral engagement surface 130 into snap-fit, interlocking sealed engagement with the base lower peripheral engagement surface 126. At the same time, the insert upper peripheral engagement surface 184 can be

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pressed into snap-fit, interlocking sealed engagement with the base upper peripheral engagement surface 196. Upon assembly of the insert 104 onto the base 102, a food item can be loaded onto the support panel 128 of the insert 104, and plastic wrap or a lid can be installed to cover the top of the container 100. Liquid exuded from the food item can drain into the liquid collection reservoir 124, where it is isolated from the food item, and obscured from view by at least the bead outer sidewalls 118 of the peripheral bead 108.

After use, the base 102 and the insert 104 can be separated to facilitate cleaning and recycling. For example, the base 102 and the insert 104 may be separated to dispose of any liquid collected in the liquid collection reservoir 124. The rinsed and separated base 102 and insert 104 can then be introduced into a recycling process.

Referring now to FIG. 9, another example container 1100 in accordance with aspects of the teaching disclosed herein includes the base 102 and the insert 104 of the container 100, but the base 102 and insert 104 are formed together from a single sheet of plastic, and are connected together along a first living hinge 1206. The first living hinge 1206 is formed between respective first upper edges of the base 102 and the insert 104. Assembly of the insert 104 onto the base 102 of the container 1100 includes pivoting the insert 104 relative to the base 102 about the first living hinge 1206.

In the example illustrated, the container 1100 further includes an optional lid 1208 that is releasably engageable with at least one of the insert rim 182 and the base rim 194 to open and close the container. The lid 1208 is, in the example illustrated, formed together with the base 102 and insert 104 from the same single sheet of plastic. The lid 1208 is connected to the base 102 along a second edge of the base by a second living hinge 1210. The container 1100 can be selectively opened and closed by pivoting the lid 1208 relative to the base 102 about the second living hinge 1210.

Referring to FIGS. 10-12A, another example of a container 2100 according to aspects of the present teaching has some similarity to the container 100, with like features identified by like reference characters, incremented by 2000.

Referring to FIG. 11, the container 2100 includes a base 2102 and an insert 2104. In the example illustrated, the base 2102 includes a reservoir bottom panel 2106 and a base lower peripheral engagement surface 2126, like those of the base 102 of the container 100.

Referring to FIGS. 12 and 12A, the base 2102 further includes a reservoir sidewall 2218 extending about and upward from a perimeter of the reservoir bottom panel 2106, a base shoulder 2220 extending laterally outward from an upper end of the reservoir sidewall 2218, and a base upper sidewall 2186 extending upward from a laterally outer edge of the base shoulder 2220. At least a lower portion of reservoir sidewall 2218 and the reservoir bottom panel 2106 enclose, laterally and from below, a liquid collection reservoir 2124. In the example illustrated, the liquid collection reservoir is enclosed, laterally by the lower portion of the reservoir sidewall 2218, and from below by the reservoir bottom panel 2106. The base upper sidewall 2186, in the example illustrated, further includes a base rim 2194.

At least the lower portion of the reservoir sidewall 2218 is spaced laterally inwardly from the base upper sidewall 2186 by a lateral distance 2222. As will be discussed subsequently herein, the lateral distance 2222 between the lower portion of the reservoir sidewall 2218 and the base upper sidewall 2186 helps to impede visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir 2124.

In the example illustrated, the base lower peripheral engagement surface 2126 includes an upper portion of the

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reservoir sidewall 2218 and a laterally inner portion of the base shoulder 2220 (FIG. 12A). In the example illustrated, the base 2102 is without a peripheral bead that encircles a perimeter of the reservoir bottom panel 2106 (like the peripheral bead 108 of the base 102).

The insert 2104 includes a support panel 2128 with at least one drain aperture 2132, an insert lower sidewall 2140, a lower flange 2144, and an insert lower peripheral engagement surface 2130, like those of the insert 104 of the container 100. In the example illustrated, the insert 2104 is a low-profile insert, without an insert upper sidewall (like the insert upper sidewall 174) extending upward from the flange 2144 to an upper end of the container 2100. The insert 2104 is also without an insert upper peripheral engagement surface (like the insert upper peripheral engagement surface 184). In the example illustrated, the support panel 2128 further includes a depression 2170 associated with each drain aperture 2132, like the depression 170 of support panel 128 (FIG. 12).

In the example illustrated, the base 2102 further includes a flow regulator 2150 for each drain aperture 2132 of the insert 2104, like the flow regulator 150 of the base 102 (FIG. 11).

For use, the insert 2104 is assembled onto the base 2102 by pressing the insert lower peripheral engagement surface 2130 into snap-fit, interlocking sealed engagement with the base lower peripheral engagement surface 2126 (FIGS. 12 and 12A). A food item can be loaded onto the support panel 2128 of the insert 2104, and plastic wrap or a lid can be installed to cover the top of the container 2100. Liquid exuded from the food item can drain into the liquid collection reservoir 2124, where it is isolated from the food item, and obscured from view by at least the lateral distance between the lower portion of the reservoir sidewall 2218 and the base upper sidewall 2186.

When the insert 2104 is assembled onto the base 2102, a vertical distance 2223 extends between the reservoir bottom panel 2106 and an underside surface of the support panel 2128. The lateral distance 2222 between the lower portion of the reservoir sidewall 2218 and the base upper sidewall 2186 is at least as great as the vertical distance 2223 between the reservoir bottom panel 2106 and the underside surface of the support panel 2128 (FIG. 12). Such a configuration helps to impede visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir 2124 when the insert 2104 is assembled onto the base 2102. In the example illustrated, the lateral distance 2222 between the lower portion of the reservoir sidewall 2218 and the base upper sidewall 2186 is about three times greater than the vertical distance 2223 between the reservoir bottom panel 2106 and the underside surface of the support panel 2128.

After use, the insert 2104 can be separated from the base 2102 by disengaging the releasable engagement surfaces 2126, 2130. The insert 2104 and the base 2102 can then be rinsed and delivered to a recycling process.

Referring to FIGS. 13-15A, another example of a container 3100 according to aspects of the present teaching has some similarity to the container 100, with like features identified by like reference characters, incremented by 3000.

Referring to FIG. 14, the container 3100 includes a base 3102 and an insert 3104. In the example illustrated, the base 3102 includes a reservoir bottom panel 3106, a peripheral bead 3108, and a base lower peripheral engagement surface 3126, like those of the base 102 of the container 100. The base 3102, in the example illustrated, is a low-profile base, without an upwardly extending base sidewall (e.g., like base sidewall 186 of the container 100).

The insert **3104** includes a support panel **3128** with at least one drain aperture **3132**, an insert lower sidewall **3140**, an insert lower flange **3144**, and an insert lower peripheral engagement surface **3130**. In the example illustrated, the insert **3104** further includes an insert upper sidewall **3174** with an insert rim **3182**.

For use, the insert **3104** is assembled onto the base **3102** by pressing the insert lower peripheral engagement surface **3130** into snap-fit, interlocking sealed engagement with the base lower peripheral engagement surface **3126** (FIGS. **15** and **15A**). A food item can be loaded onto the support panel **3128** of the insert **3104**, and plastic wrap or a lid can be installed to cover the top of the container **3100**. Liquid exuded from the food item can drain into the liquid collection reservoir **3124**, where it is isolated from the food item, and obscured from view by at least the bead outer sidewalls **3118** of the peripheral bead **3108**.

After use, the insert **3104** can be separated from the base **3102** by disengaging the releasable engagement surfaces **3126**, **3130**. The insert **3104** and the base **3102** can then be rinsed and delivered to a recycling process.

Referring to FIG. **16**, another example of a container **4100** in accordance to aspects of the present teaching has some similarity to the container **100**, with like features identified by like reference characters, incremented by **4000**.

Referring also to FIG. **17**, the container **4100** includes a base **4102** and an insert **4104**. In the example illustrated, the container **4100** has multiple food receiving compartments **4228** isolated from one another, and a corresponding liquid collection reservoir **4124** beneath at least one of the compartments. The base **4102** provides a respective base lower peripheral engagement surface **4126** about each of the at least one liquid collection reservoirs **4124**, and the insert **4104** provides a respective insert peripheral engagement surface **4130** extending about a lower end of each compartment **4228** that overlies a corresponding one of the at least one liquid collection reservoirs **4124**. Each respective insert lower peripheral engagement surface **4130** is releasably inter-lockable with the corresponding base lower peripheral engagement surface **4126** to assemble the insert **4104** in sealed interlocking engagement with the base **4102** about the periphery of each liquid collection reservoir **4124**.

More particularly, in the example illustrated, the container **4100** has five compartments including four outer compartments **4228a** spaced apart circumferentially from one another about a central compartment **4228b**. The base **4102** in the example illustrated has five liquid collection reservoirs **4124**, including four outer liquid collection reservoirs **4124a** spaced circumferentially about one central liquid collection reservoir **4124b**.

In the example illustrated, the base **4102** includes a respective reservoir bottom panel **4106a**, **4106b** for enclosing each corresponding liquid collection reservoir **4124a**, **4124b** from below. More particularly, in the example illustrated, the base **4102** includes a central bottom panel **4106b** (FIG. **17**) that forms a lower surface of the central liquid collection reservoir **4124b**. In the example illustrated, the central bottom panel **4106b** is generally circular in shape when viewed from above. The base **4102** further includes a central peripheral bead **4108b** having a central bead inner sidewall **4110b** extending upward from a perimeter of the central bottom panel **4106b**, a central bead top wall **4114b** extending laterally outward from an upper end of the central bead inner sidewall **4110b**, and a central bead outer sidewall **4118b** extending downward from a laterally outer edge of the central bead top wall **4114b**. At least a lower portion of the central bead inner sidewall **4110b** laterally encloses the

central liquid collection reservoir **4124b**. The base **4102** further includes a central base peripheral engagement surface **4126b** that extends about the central liquid collection reservoir **4124b**, and that, in the example illustrated, comprises an upper portion of the central peripheral bead inner sidewall **4110b**.

The insert **4104** includes a central compartment support panel **4128b** disposed at a lower end of the central compartment **4228b** and having a central insert peripheral engagement surface **4130b** releasably inter-lockable with the central base peripheral engagement surface **4126b**. The central support panel **4128b** includes at least one aperture **4132** for draining liquid from above into the central liquid collection reservoir **4124b**.

In the example illustrated, the base **4102** includes four outer bottom panels **4106a** (FIG. **17**) that each form a lower surface of a respective one of the liquid collection reservoirs **4124a**. In the example illustrated, each outer bottom panel **4106b** is generally kidney-shaped when viewed from above. The outer (circumferential) liquid collection reservoirs **4124a** are, in the example illustrated, separated by radially extending webs **4224** (FIG. **17**) each having spaced apart web sidewalls **4226** extending upward from circumferential ends of adjacent bottom panels **4106a**, and a web top wall **4230** extending laterally between upper ends of the web sidewalls **4226**.

The base **4102** further includes a plurality of outer peripheral bead segments **4108a** each having an outer bead inner sidewall **4110a** extending upward from a perimeter segment of the outer bottom panel **4106a**, an outer bead top wall **4114a** extending laterally outward from an upper end of the outer bead inner sidewall **4110a**, and an outer bead outer sidewall **4118a** extending downward from a laterally outer edge of the central bead top wall **4114a**. At least a lower portion of the outer bead inner sidewall **4110a** laterally encloses the outer liquid collection reservoir **4124a** (FIG. **18**). The peripheral bead segments **4108a** can impede visual access to liquid in the respective outer liquid collection reservoir **4124a**. In particular, the outer bead outer sidewall **4118a** positioned laterally outward of the outer bead inner sidewall **4110a** can help to conceal liquid in the respective liquid collection reservoir **4124a** by impeding visual access to such liquid.

The base **4102** further includes a plurality of circumferentially extending web segments **4232** each having a web inner sidewall **4234** extending upward from a radially inward perimeter segment of the outer bottom panel **4106a**, and a web upper wall **4236** (FIG. **18**) extending laterally inward from an upper end of the web inner sidewall **4234**. Circumferentially opposed ends of the web inner sidewall **4234** adjoin a respective web sidewall **4226** of the radially extending web **4224** (FIG. **17**). At least a lower portion of the web inner sidewall **4234** and opposed web sidewalls **4226** laterally enclose the outer liquid collection reservoir **4124a**.

The base **4102** further includes a respective outer base peripheral engagement surface **4126a** that extends about a corresponding outer liquid collection reservoir **4124a**, and that, in the example illustrated, comprises an upper portion of each of the outer peripheral bead inner sidewall **4110a**, the web inner sidewall **4234** and the opposed web sidewalls **4226**.

The insert **4104** includes a respective outer compartment support panel **4128a** disposed at a lower end of each corresponding outer compartment **4126a** and having an outer insert peripheral engagement surface **4130a**, each of which is releasably inter-lockable with a corresponding

outer base peripheral engagement surface **4126a**. Each outer support panel **4128a** includes at least one aperture **4132** for draining liquid from above into the corresponding outer liquid collection reservoir **4124a** therebelow.

For use, the insert **4104** is assembled onto the base **4102** by pressing the insert peripheral engagement surfaces **4130** into snap-fit, interlocking sealed engagement with respective base peripheral engagement surfaces **4126** (FIG. 18). The same or a different food item can be loaded onto each support panel **4128a**, **4128b** of the insert **4104**, and plastic wrap or a lid can be installed to cover the top of the container **4100**. Liquid exuded from each food item can drain into the respective liquid collection reservoir **4124a**, **4124b** located below that food item, where it is isolated from the food item. Liquid collected in outer liquid collection reservoirs **4124a** is obscured from view by at least the outer bead outer sidewall **4118a** of the respective outer peripheral bead segment **4108a**. Liquid collected in the central liquid collection reservoir **4124b** is obscured from view by at least the central bead outer sidewall **4118b** of the central peripheral bead segment **4108b**.

After use, the insert **4104** can be separated from the base **4102** by disengaging the releasable engagement surfaces **4126**, **4130**. The insert **4104** and the base **4102** can then be rinsed and delivered to a recycling process.

Referring to FIGS. 19-21A, another example of a container **5100** according to aspects of the present teaching has some similarity to the container **2100**, with like features identified by like reference characters, incremented by 3000.

Referring to FIG. 20, the container **5100** includes a base **5102** and an insert **5104**. In the example illustrated, the base **5102** includes a reservoir bottom panel **5106** and a base lower peripheral engagement surface **5126**, like those of the base **2102** of container **2100**.

Referring to FIG. 21A, the base **5102** further includes a reservoir sidewall **5218** extending about and upward from a perimeter of the reservoir bottom panel **5106**, a base shoulder **5220** extending laterally outward from an upper end of the reservoir sidewall **5218**, and a base upper sidewall **5186** extending upward from a laterally outer edge of the base shoulder **5220**. In the example illustrated, the reservoir sidewall **5218** and the reservoir bottom panel **5106** enclose, laterally and from below, a liquid collection reservoir **5124**. In the example illustrated, the base upper sidewall **5186** further includes a base rim **5194**.

At least a lower portion **5238** of the reservoir sidewall **5218** is spaced laterally inwardly from the base upper sidewall **5186** by a lateral distance. In the example illustrated, the lower portion **5238** reservoir sidewall **5218** is spaced laterally inwardly from the base upper sidewall **5186** by a lateral distance **5222**. The lateral distance **5222** between the reservoir sidewall **5218** and the base upper sidewall **5186** can help to impede visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir **5124**.

In the example illustrated, the reservoir sidewall **5218** includes an upper portion **5240** disposed laterally outward of the lower portion **5238** and connected to the lower portion **5238** by a generally horizontal step surface **5241**. The step surface **5241** engages the underside surface of the insert **5204** when the insert **5204** is assembled onto the base **5202**.

With reference to FIG. 21A, the upper portion **5240** of the reservoir sidewall **5218** extends downward from the base shoulder **5220** to a laterally outer edge of the step surface **5241**. The lower portion **5238** of the reservoir sidewall **5218** extends downward from a laterally inner edge of the step surface **5241** to the reservoir bottom panel **5106**.

In the example illustrated, the base lower peripheral engagement surface **5126** includes the step surface **5241** and the upper portion **5240** of the reservoir sidewall **5218** (FIG. 21A). In example illustrated, the base **5102** is without a peripheral bead that encircles a perimeter of the reservoir bottom panel **5106** (like the peripheral bead **108** of the base **102**).

With reference to FIGS. 20 and 21A, the insert **5104** includes a support panel **5128** with at least one drain aperture **5132**, an insert lower sidewall **5140**, a lower flange **5144**, and an insert lower peripheral engagement surface **5130**, like those of the insert **2104** of the container **2100**. In the example illustrated, the insert lower peripheral engagement surface **5130** includes an underside surface of a peripheral portion of the support panel **5128** configured to bear against the step surface **5241**.

In the example illustrated, the insert lower peripheral engagement surface **5130** includes the insert lower sidewall **5140** and a peripheral portion of the support panel **5128** (FIG. 21A). The insert lower engagement surface **5130** further includes, in the example illustrated, an outer surface of the insert lower sidewall **5140** configured to bear against the upper portion **5240** of the reservoir sidewall **5218**.

In the example illustrated, the insert **5104** is a low-profile insert, without an insert upper sidewall (like the insert upper sidewall **174**) extending upward from the flange **5144** to an upper end of the container **5100**. The insert **5104** is also without an insert upper peripheral engagement surface (like the insert upper peripheral engagement surface **184**).

With reference to FIGS. 20 and 21, in the example illustrated, the support panel **5128** further includes a depression **5170** associated with each drain aperture **5132**, like the depressions **2170** of support panel **2128**. The base **5102**, in the example illustrated, further includes a flow regulator **5150** for each drain aperture **5132** of the insert **5104**, like the flow regulators **2150** of the base **2102**.

Referring again to FIG. 20, in the example illustrated, the support panel **5128** has nine drain apertures **5132** for draining liquid from above into the liquid collection reservoir **5124**. Five of the drain apertures **5132** are, in the example illustrated, spaced apart along a longitudinal centerline of the support panel **5128**. In the example illustrated, the four remaining drain apertures **5132** are spaced apart along a lateral centerline of the support panel **5128** that extends through a central one of the five longitudinally spaced apart drain apertures **5132**. Two of the four laterally spaced apart drain apertures **5132** are located on each side of the longitudinal centerline.

Referring still to FIG. 20, in the example illustrated, the support panel **5128** includes a panel upper surface **5164** and a plurality of spaced-apart risers **5166** projecting upward from the panel upper surface **5164**. The risers **5166** each have a riser top surface spaced above the panel upper surface **5164** for holding food items in the container **5100** above the panel upper surface **5164**. In the example illustrated, the risers **5166** are elongated compared to the risers **166** of the container **100** (FIG. 2). Each riser **5166** extends, in the example illustrated, from a riser first end **5242** located proximate the perimeter of the support panel **5128** to a riser second end **5244** located proximate a respective one of the drain apertures **5132**. In the example illustrated, the panel upper surface **5164** between the risers is generally flat and inclined toward the drain apertures **5132**. Such a configuration can facilitate flow of liquid from the food items along the panel upper surface **5164** between the elongated risers **5166** toward one or more of the drain apertures **5132**.

In the example illustrated, the base **5102** includes a plurality of spaced-apart panel braces **5246**. Each panel brace **5246** projects upwardly from the reservoir bottom panel **5106** and is generally cylindrical in shape. When the insert **5104** is assembled onto the base **5102** (FIGS. **21** and **21A**) and one or more food items are loaded on the support panel **5128**, the panel braces **5246** can assist in maintaining a vertical separation between the support panel **5128** and the reservoir bottom panel **5106** by abutting an underside surface of the support panel **5128**. Maintaining the vertical separation between the support panel **5128** and the reservoir bottom panel **5106** can prevent the reservoir bottom panel **5106** from impeding flow of liquid into the liquid collection reservoir **5124** through the drain apertures **5132**. The capacity of the liquid collection reservoir **5124** could decrease if the support panel **5128** were permitted to sag under the load of food items. Maintaining the vertical separation between the support panel **5128** and the reservoir bottom panel **5106** can also preserve the capacity of the liquid collection reservoir **5124** when the support panel **5128** is under load.

Referring again to FIG. **20**, in the example illustrated, some of the panel braces **5246** are positioned proximate to flow regulators **5150** on the reservoir bottom panel **5106**. When the insert **5104** is assembled onto the base **5102**, these panel braces **5246** abut the underside surface of the support panel **5128** proximate one or more of the drain apertures **5132**. Such a configuration can further ensure there is a vertical separation between the drain apertures **5132** and the reservoir bottom panel **5106** to allow liquid exuded from the food items to pass into the liquid collection reservoir **5124**.

In some examples, the base **5102** includes additional structural elements for maintaining the vertical separation between the support panel **5128** and the reservoir bottom panel **5106** when the insert **5104** is assembled onto the base **5102**. In the example illustrated, the base **5102** includes a plurality of elongate panel braces **5247** that project upwardly from the reservoir bottom panel **5106**. Each elongate panel brace **5247** has a rounded top surface that abuts the underside surface of the support panel **5128** between adjacent risers **5166** when the insert **5104** is assembled onto the base **5102**. In the example illustrated, the base **5102** also includes plurality of supplemental panel braces **5249** that are generally spaced apart about the perimeter of the reservoir bottom panel **5106**. The supplemental panel braces **5249** project upwardly from the reservoir bottom panel **5106** and abut the underside surface of the support panel **5128** when the insert **5104** is assembled onto the base **5102**. When the insert **5104** is assembled onto the base **5102** and one or more food items are loaded on the support panel **5128**, the panel braces **5247**, **5249** can further assist in maintaining a vertical separation between the support panel **5128** and the reservoir bottom panel **5106** by abutting the underside surface of the support panel **5128**.

Referring to FIG. **21**, in the example illustrated, an elevation of the support panel **5128** proximate the insert lower sidewall **5140** is higher than an elevation of the support panel **5128** at the drain apertures **5132**. Such a configuration facilitates the flow of exuded liquid along the panel upper surface **5164** to the drain apertures **5132**. In cases where the container **5100** is inverted, such a configuration may also impede the collected liquid from flowing along a lower surface of the support panel **5128** to the one or more drain apertures **5132** (i.e., because the lower panel surface slopes away from the drain apertures **5132** when the container **5100** is inverted).

In the example illustrated, the base lower shoulder **5238** supports a peripheral portion of the support panel **5128** from

below when the insert **5104** is assembled onto the base **5102**. This engagement can help maintain a vertical separation between the support panel **5128** and the reservoir bottom panel **5106** about the perimeter of the liquid collection reservoir **5124**.

Referring again to FIG. **20**, the insert **5104** includes optional nesting features that facilitate stacking of the containers. In the example illustrated, the insert **5104** includes four nesting members **5248** in the form of raised wedge-shaped projections. Each of the nesting members **5248** projects upwardly from the panel upper surface **5164** proximate a respective corner of the support panel **5128**. The nesting members **5248** each have a top surface. The top surface of each nesting member **5248** is at a higher elevation than i) the top surface of each riser **5166** and ii) the lower flange **5144** of the insert **5104**. When multiple containers **5100** are stacked together, the nesting members **5248** of a lower container **5100** in the stack abuts an underside surface of the reservoir bottom panel **5106** of the container **5100** directly above. The nesting members **5248** can assist in keeping a stack of containers straight when one container **5100** is dropped on another during manufacturing. In some examples, the underside surface of the reservoir bottom panel **5106** has corresponding female nesting members that engage the male nesting members **5248** of the above container **5100**. Such an engagement may further improve the stability of a stack of containers.

For use, the insert **5104** is assembled onto the base **5102** by pressing the insert lower peripheral engagement surface **5130** into snap-fit, interlocking sealed engagement with the base lower peripheral engagement surface **5126** (FIG. **21A**). A food item can be loaded onto the support panel **5128** of the insert **5104**, and plastic wrap or a lid can be installed to cover the top of the container **5100**. Liquid exuded from the food item can drain into the liquid collection reservoir **5124**.

In the example illustrated, snap-fit interlocking assembly of the base and insert lower peripheral engagement surfaces **5126**, **5130** is facilitated by having the upper end of the base intermediate sidewall **5240** define (or bound) an opening that is slightly smaller than a footprint defining the lower edge of the insert lower sidewall **5140**. To assemble the insert **5104** onto the base **5102**, the lower edge of the insert lower sidewall **5140** can be pressed vertically downward (as viewed in FIG. **21A**) against the base **5102** and urged past the upper end of the base intermediate sidewall **5240**, resiliently deforming the respective surfaces of the insert and base, until the surfaces pass one another and the base intermediate sidewall **5240** and the insert lower sidewall **5140** snap back toward their undeformed state. Some resilient compressive forces remain upon assembly, so that a generally fluid-tight seal is provided by the interlocking engagement of the lower peripheral engagement surfaces **5126**, **5130**.

When the insert **5104** is assembled onto the base **5102**, a vertical distance extends **5223** between the reservoir bottom panel **5106** and the underside surface of the support panel **5128**. The lateral distance **5222** between the lower portion **5238** of the reservoir sidewall **5218** and the base upper sidewall **5186** is at least as great as the vertical distance **5223** between the reservoir bottom panel **5106** and the underside surface of the support panel **5128**. Such a configuration helps to impede visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir **5124** when the insert **5104** is assembled onto the base **5102**. In the example illustrated, the lateral distance **5222** between the lower portion **5238** of the reservoir sidewall **5218** and the base upper sidewall **5186** is about two times greater than the vertical distance **5223** between the

reservoir bottom panel **5106** and the underside surface of the support panel **5128** (FIG. 21A).

After use, the insert **5104** can be separated from the base **5102** by disengaging the releasable engagement surfaces **5126**, **5130**. The insert **5104** and the base **5102** can then be rinsed and delivered to a recycling process. Referring to FIG. 20, in the example illustrated, the insert **5104** includes an optional user pull tab **5250** to facilitate separation of the insert **5104** and the base **5102**. Urging the user pull tab **5250** in a direction away from the reservoir bottom panel **5106** can overcome the compressive forces between the lower peripheral engagement surfaces **5126**, **5130** and resiliently deforms the insert **5104**, which gives the insert lower sidewall **5140** clearance to disengage the upper portion **5240** of the reservoir sidewall **5218**.

Referring to FIGS. 22-24, another example of a container **6100** according to aspects of the present teaching has some similarity to the container **1100**, with like features identified by like reference characters, incremented by 5000. The container **6100** includes a base **6102** and an insert **6104** that are formed together from a single sheet of plastic and connected together along a first living hinge **6206**. The first living hinge **6206** is formed between respective first upper edges of the base **6102** and the insert **6104**.

The base **6102** includes a reservoir bottom panel **6106**, a peripheral bead **6108**, a base lower peripheral engagement surface **6126**, and a base sidewall **6186**, like those of the base **102**. In the example illustrated, the base sidewall **6186** further includes a base rim **6194**. The base **6102**, in the example illustrated, is without a base upper peripheral engagement surface (like the base upper peripheral engagement surface **196** of the base **102**).

Referring to FIG. 23, in the example illustrated, the base **6102** further includes a base bottom wall **6252** extending laterally between the peripheral bead **6108** and the base sidewall **6186**. The base bottom wall **6252** is, in the example illustrated, at equal elevation with the reservoir bottom panel **6106**. Such a configuration can enhance stability of the container **6100** when placed on a support surface since both the base bottom wall **6252** and the reservoir bottom panel **6106** can engage the support surface. In the example illustrated, the base bottom wall **6252** increases a lateral separation between the peripheral bead **6108** and a lower portion of the base sidewall **6186**. The increased lateral separation between the peripheral bead **6108** and the lower portion of the base sidewall **6186** further impedes visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir **6124**.

Referring to FIG. 22, the insert **6104** includes a support panel **6128** with at least one drain aperture **6132**, an insert lower sidewall **6140**, a lower flange **6144**, and an insert lower peripheral engagement surface **6130**, like those of the insert **104**. In the example illustrated, the insert **6104** is without an insert upper peripheral engagement surface (like the insert upper peripheral engagement surface **184** of the base **102**). In the example illustrated, the insert **6104** further includes an insert upper sidewall **6174** with an insert rim **6182**.

Assembly of the insert **6104** onto the base **6102** of the container **6100** involves pivoting the insert **6104** relative to the base **6102** about the first living hinge **6206** (FIG. 23). Then the insert **6104** can be releasably secured to the base **6102** by pressing the insert lower peripheral engagement surface **6130** into snap-fit, interlocking sealed engagement with the base lower peripheral engagement surface **6126**. The interlocked engagement between the base and insert

lower peripheral engagement surfaces **6126**, **6130** contribute to preventing liquid from leaking out of the liquid collection reservoir **6124** (FIG. 24).

With reference to FIG. 22, in the example illustrated, the support panel **6128** further includes a depression **6170** associated with each drain aperture **6132**, like the depressions **170** of support panel **128**. The base **6102**, in the example illustrated, further includes a flow regulator **6150** for each drain aperture **6132** of the insert **6104**, like the flow regulators **150** of the base **102**.

Referring to FIG. 23, in the example illustrated, the support panel **6128** includes a panel upper surface **6164** and a plurality of spaced-apart risers **6166** projecting upward from the panel upper surface **6164**. The risers **6166** each have a riser top surface spaced above the panel upper surface **6164** for holding food items in the container **6100** above the panel upper surface **6164**. In the example illustrated, the panel upper surface **6164** between the risers **6166** is generally flat and inclined toward the drain apertures **6132**. The top surface of each riser **6166** is, in the example illustrated, rounded to facilitate drainage from the food item to the panel upper surface **6164**.

In the example illustrated, the risers **6166** have hollow interiors bounded at least in part by concave inner surfaces. The inner surfaces of the risers **6166** are directed toward the reservoir bottom panel **6106** and form a ceiling of the liquid collection reservoir **6124** (FIG. 24). In cases where the container **6100** may be inverted or near-inverted, such as, for example, during handling by a potential purchaser, liquid can collect in the riser interiors which can help prevent liquid from flowing in reverse through the drain apertures **6132**, from the (inverted) liquid collection reservoir **6124** back toward the food item in the container **6100**.

Referring again to FIG. 22, the base **6102** optionally includes a plurality of spaced-apart panel braces **6246**, like the panel braces **5246** of base **5102**. Each panel brace **6246** projects upward from the reservoir bottom panel **6106**. When the insert **6104** is assembled onto the base **6102** and one or more food items are loaded on the support panel **6128**, the panel braces **6246** can assist in maintaining a vertical separation between the support panel **6128** and the reservoir bottom panel **6106** by abutting an underside surface of the support panel **6128**. Maintaining the vertical separation between the support panel **6128** and the reservoir bottom panel **6106** can prevent the reservoir bottom panel **6106** from impeding flow of liquid into the liquid collection reservoir **6124** through the drain apertures **6132**. The capacity of the liquid collection reservoir **6124** (FIG. 24) could decrease if the support panel **6128** were permitted to sag under the load of food items. Maintaining the vertical separation between the support panel **6128** and the reservoir bottom panel **6106** can also preserve the capacity of the liquid collection reservoir **6124** when the support panel **6128** is under load.

In the example illustrated, the panel braces **6246** each have an upper end spaced above the reservoir bottom panel **6106**. The upper end of each panel brace **6246** is, in the example illustrated, sized to fit within the hollow interior of a corresponding one of the risers **6166** of the support panel **6128** when the insert **6104** is assembled onto the base **6102** (FIG. 24). Such engagement between the panel braces **6246** and the risers **6166** can further assist in maintaining the vertical separation between the support panel **6128** and the reservoir bottom panel **6106**.

In the example illustrated, the container **6100** further includes an optional lid **6208** having a lid rim **6154** that is releasably engageable with the base rim **6194** to open and

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close the container 6100. The lid 6208 is, in the example illustrated, formed together with the base 6102 and insert 6104 from the same single sheet of plastic. The lid 6208 is connected to the base 6102 along a second edge of the base 6102 by a second living hinge 6210. The container 6100 can be selectively opened and closed by pivoting the lid 6208 relative to the base 6102 about the second living hinge 6210.

Referring to FIG. 22, in the example illustrated, the base rim 6194 is interrupted by the first living hinge 6206 which connects the base 6102 and the insert 6104. The base rim 6194 does not completely encircle the perimeter of the base 6102 to provide space for the first living hinge 6206. The lid rim 6154 includes an accessibility recess 6156 that aligns with the interruption in the base rim 6194 when the lid 6208 is closed. The accessibility recess 6156 offers a convenient location for a user to grip and open the lid 6208.

The base 6102 optionally includes a plurality of base vents 6258. In the example illustrated, the base vents 6258 are laterally spaced apart about the perimeter of the base 6102. Each base vent 6258, in the example illustrated, has a lower portion formed in the base bottom wall 6252 and a contiguous upper portion formed in the base sidewall 6186 that extends upwardly from a laterally outer edge of the lower portion.

The insert 6104 optionally includes a plurality of insert vents 6260. In the example illustrated, insert vents 6260 are laterally spaced apart about the perimeter of the insert 6104. Each insert vent 6260, in the example illustrated, has a lower portion formed in the lower flange 6144 and a contiguous upper portion formed in the insert upper sidewall 6174 that extends upwardly from a laterally outer edge of the lower portion.

When the insert 6104 is assembled to the base 6102 and the lid 6208 is closed, the base and insert vents 6258, 6260 allow air to pass into and out of the interior of the container 6100. Some food items (e.g., fruits) naturally emit ethylene gas when stored. Ethylene accelerates the ripening of fruit. The base and insert vents 6258, 6260 allow the emitted gas to escape so that the stored food items do not spoil too quickly.

In the example illustrated, when the insert 6104 is assembled to the base 6102, each of the insert vents 6260 aligns with a corresponding one of the base vents 6258. Such a configuration can provide a direct pathway for air to flow into and out of the interior of the container 6100. In an alternative example, the insert vents 6260 and the base vents 6258 do not align when the insert 6104 is assembled to the base 6102. The lid 6208 optionally includes a plurality of lid vents 6262. In the example illustrated, the lid vents 6262 are laterally spaced apart about the perimeter of the lid 6108. The lid vents 6262 further increase the volume of air that can be circulated through the interior of the container 6100.

After use, the lid 6208 can be opened and the insert 6104 can be disassembled from the base 6102 by pivoting the insert 6104 relative to the base 6102 about the first living hinge 6206 with sufficient force to disengage the releasable engagement surfaces 6126, 6130. The insert 6104, the base 6102 and, optionally, the lid 6208 can then be rinsed and delivered to a recycling process.

The container 6100 includes optional stacking features that facilitate stacking the containers 6100 when in a closed configuration (FIG. 24). In the example illustrated, the lid 6208 includes four stacking members 6264. Each of the stacking members 6264 projects upwardly from the upper surface of the lid 6208 proximate a respective corner of the lid 6208. In the example illustrated, the stacking members 6264 are configured to fit within a portion of the peripheral

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bead 6108 of a container below. When the multiple containers 6100 are stacked, the stacking members 6264 on the lid 6108 of a container 6100 engage the peripheral bead 6108 of the container 6100 immediately above. Such engagement may impede the stacked containers 6100 from sliding laterally relative to each other and thereby enhances stability of the containers in the stack. This may be particularly beneficial in cases where the containers 6100 are stacked on a sloped surface of merchandise display.

What has been described above is intended to be illustrative of examples of the teaching disclosed herein, without limiting the scope of patent claims granted herefrom. The scope of such claims should be given the broadest interpretation consistent with the description as a whole.

The invention claimed is:

1. A container for food items, comprising:

- a) a base formed of transparent plastic and including a reservoir bottom panel and a peripheral bead, the peripheral bead having a bead inner sidewall extending about and upward from a perimeter of the reservoir bottom panel, a bead top wall extending laterally outward from an upper end of the bead inner sidewall, and a bead outer sidewall extending downward from a laterally outer edge of the bead top wall, at least a lower portion of the bead inner sidewall and the reservoir bottom panel enclosing, laterally and from below, a liquid collection reservoir, and the base including a base lower peripheral engagement surface extending about the liquid collection reservoir, wherein the base lower peripheral engagement surface comprises at least a portion of at least one of: (i) the bead inner sidewall, and (ii) the bead top wall;
- b) an insert formed of plastic and including a support panel having an insert lower peripheral engagement surface, the insert lower peripheral engagement surface releasably inter-lockable with the base lower peripheral engagement surface to assemble the insert to the base with the support panel overlying the liquid collection reservoir, the support panel having at least one drain aperture for draining liquid from above into the liquid collection reservoir;

wherein at least a portion of the bead outer sidewall is at equal elevation with, and spaced laterally outward from, the lower portion of the bead inner sidewall to impede visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir.

2. The container of claim 1, wherein the base lower peripheral engagement surface comprises at least a portion of the bead inner sidewall.

3. The container of claim 1, wherein the base lower peripheral engagement surface comprises at least a portion of the bead top wall.

4. The container of claim 1, wherein the insert further comprises an insert lower sidewall extending upward from a panel perimeter of the support panel, and further comprises an insert lower flange extending laterally outward from an upper end of the insert lower sidewall.

5. The container of claim 4, wherein the insert lower flange bears against the bead top wall when the insert and the base are assembled together.

6. The container of claim 4, wherein the insert lower peripheral engagement surface comprises at least a portion of the insert lower sidewall.

7. The container of claim 1, wherein at least one of the insert lower peripheral engagement surface and the base lower peripheral engagement surface is resiliently deform-

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able to provide snap-fit, interlocking seal engagement therebetween when the insert is assembled to the base.

8. The container of claim 1, wherein the base further includes a flow regulator for each drain aperture of the insert, the flow regulator projecting upward from the reservoir bottom panel and aligned with the drain aperture when the insert is assembled to the base, the flow regulator occluding a central portion of the drain aperture to regulate liquid flow through the drain aperture and to inhibit reverse flow of liquid from the liquid collection reservoir back through the drain aperture when the container is tilted or inverted.

9. The container of claim 8, wherein an upper portion of the flow regulator protrudes through the drain aperture.

10. The container of claim 8, wherein the drain aperture is circular, and the flow regulator comprises a rounded upwardly projecting bulge concentric with the drain aperture.

11. The container of claim 8, wherein an annular flow gap is provided between an outer surface of the flow regulator and an inner surface of the drain aperture.

12. The container of claim 1, wherein the support panel includes a panel upper surface and a plurality of spaced apart risers projecting upward from the panel upper surface, the risers each having a riser top surface spaced above the panel upper surface for holding food items in the container above the panel upper surface and facilitating flow of liquid from the food items along the panel upper surface between the risers and to the drain aperture.

13. The container of claim 12, wherein the support panel includes a depression associated with each drain aperture, wherein the depression has a lowered central wall with an upwardly directed surface that is lower than the panel upper surface adjacent the depression, and wherein the drain aperture extends through the lowered central wall of the depression.

14. The container of claim 4, wherein the insert includes an insert upper sidewall having an insert upper sidewall first end joined to an outer edge of the flange and an insert upper sidewall second end spaced above the insert upper sidewall first end.

15. The container of claim 14, wherein the insert upper sidewall includes an insert rim formed at the insert upper sidewall second end, wherein the insert rim is rounded to facilitate tear-free engagement with a film wrapped over the container to preserve freshness of the food items.

16. The container of claim 14, wherein the insert upper sidewall second end includes an insert upper peripheral engagement surface extending about the container.

17. The container of claim 1, wherein the base includes a base sidewall having a base sidewall first end joined to a lower end of the bead outer sidewall, and a base sidewall second end spaced vertically above the base sidewall first end.

18. The container of claim 17, wherein the base sidewall second end includes a base rim, wherein the base rim is rounded to facilitate tear-free engagement with a film wrapped over the container to preserve freshness of the food items.

19. The container of claim 17, wherein the base sidewall second end comprises a base upper peripheral engagement surface extending about the container.

20. The container of claim 4, wherein:

the insert includes an insert upper sidewall having an insert upper sidewall first end joined to an outer edge of the flange, and an insert upper peripheral engagement

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surface extending about the container along an insert upper sidewall second end spaced above the insert upper sidewall first end;

the base includes a base sidewall having a base sidewall first end joined to a lower end of the bead outer wall, and a base upper peripheral engagement surface extending about the container along a base sidewall second end spaced vertically above the base sidewall first end, at least a portion of the base sidewall between the base sidewall first end and the base sidewall second end disposed laterally outwardly of the insert upper sidewall when the insert is assembled to the base; and the insert upper peripheral engagement surface releasably inter-lockable with the base upper peripheral engagement surface when the insert is assembled to the base, wherein a sealed chamber extends between the interlocked upper and lower peripheral engagement surfaces and about the container, the sealed chamber providing a thermal break between an outer surface of the base sidewall and an interior of the container.

21. The container of claim 1, wherein the base and the insert are formed from a single sheet of plastic and connected together along respective first edges of the base and the insert by a first living hinge, wherein assembly of the insert onto the base includes pivoting the insert relative to the base about the living hinge.

22. The container of claim 21, further comprising a lid that is releasably engageable with a rim of at least one of the base and the insert, wherein the lid is formed from the single sheet of plastic together with the base and the insert, and wherein the lid is connected to the base along a second edge of the base by a second living hinge.

23. A container for food items, comprising:

a) a base formed of transparent plastic and including a reservoir bottom panel and a reservoir sidewall, the reservoir sidewall extending about and upward from a perimeter of the reservoir bottom panel, the base further including a base shoulder extending laterally outward from an upper end of the reservoir sidewall, and a base upper sidewall extending upward from a laterally outer edge of the shoulder, at least a lower portion of the reservoir sidewall and the reservoir bottom panel enclosing, laterally and from below, a liquid collection reservoir, and the base including a base lower peripheral engagement surface extending about the liquid collection reservoir, wherein the base lower peripheral engagement surface comprises at least a portion of the reservoir sidewall;

b) an insert formed of plastic and including a support panel having an insert lower peripheral engagement surface, the insert lower peripheral engagement surface releasably inter-lockable with the base lower peripheral engagement surface to assemble the insert to the base with the support panel overlying the liquid collection reservoir, the support panel having at least one drain aperture for draining liquid from above into the liquid collection reservoir;

wherein at least the lower portion of the reservoir sidewall is spaced laterally inwardly from the base upper sidewall by a lateral distance at least as great as a vertical distance of the lower portion of the reservoir sidewall extending between the reservoir bottom panel and an underside surface of the insert when assembled to the base for impeding visual access to liquid in the liquid collection reservoir.

24. The container of claim 23, wherein the reservoir sidewall includes an upper portion disposed laterally out-

ward of the lower portion and connected to the lower portion by a generally horizontal step surface, the step surface engaging the underside surface of the insert when the insert is assembled onto the base.

25. The container of claim 24, wherein the upper portion 5 of the reservoir sidewall extends downward from the base shoulder to a laterally outer edge of the step surface, and the lower portion of the reservoir sidewall extends downward from a laterally inner edge of the step surface to the reservoir bottom panel. 10

26. The container of claim 25, wherein the insert lower peripheral engagement surface includes an underside surface of a peripheral portion of the support panel configured to bear against the step surface.

27. The container of claim 26, wherein the insert lower 15 peripheral engagement surface includes an outer surface of the insert lower sidewall configured to bear against the upper portion of the reservoir sidewall.

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